

GOOD-BYE SWEETHEART

By the Author of
"RED AS A ROSE IS SHE"

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"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART!"

A Tale.

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON,

AUTHOR OF

"COMETH UP AS A FLOWER," AND "RED AS A ROSE IS SHE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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“GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART!”

PART I.—*continued.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

“**G**OOD-BYE” is an ugly word: written or spoken, it has an ill-look—a down-looking, sighing, weeping word. There is something faintly disagreeable even in the limp handshake with which one parts from a disrelished tedious guest, as one thinks, with slight remorse, that perhaps he was not so bad after all. But of all delusions and all snares, seeing people off is the worst. It

is bad enough to take indifferent acquaintance to the train—to stand with your hand on the carriage door—the last civil regret uttered, the last friendly hope for a speedy meeting again expressed ; the smile of farewell stereotyped on your lips, while your ears thirst for the engine’s parting whistle, which will not come for five minutes yet. But how far worse to see one that is really dear to you off on a long voyage ! To stand on a cold dirty quay on some dull November morning, while the huge drab-grey sea heaves and booms before you, suggestive of shipwreck, while the harbour is robed in mist, and through it the tall ship’s masts and rigging show indistinctly great ; while all about you, unfeeling men roll barrels and carry bales, and under your veil your tears drip miserably, to the great annoyance of the dear one, who, if he be equally grieved, yet, man like, feels angry with you for adding to his sufferings ; and

if (as is most probable) he is *not* equally grieved, yet is constrained, out of sympathy, to pull a long face, while his manly soul yearns for the consolation of a pipe and cognac! Even if you are absolutely certain never to see a beloved one again, yet abstain from ‘seeing him off.’”

But Lenore thinks differently: she is bent on seeing the last of Paul. The voyage from St. Malo to Southampton is certainly not a long one, but in this case, it is not the actual breadth of the seas which will lie between the lovers that constitutes the bitterness of the parting. Paul is going on a doubtful errand—to break to two doting sisters and a gouty Calvinistic father the news that he has at length found a woman to his mind: a woman (as he himself uncomfortably feels) of the very kind most antipathetic to his people.

Lenore, meanwhile, has resolved to pass the time of suspense that must ensue at

Dinan. She has wisely made up her mind to go over each sacred spot where they first met and squabbled, and to weep plentifully at each. She will be in no whit behind Marianne Dashwood in ‘Sense and Sensibility,’ who “would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby.”

Meanwhile they have made up their little differences. Paul has eaten his words—has assured his betrothed that he habitually values people for their own merits, not for those of their forbears; that, in fact, he looks upon ancestors as rather a disadvantage than otherwise. And she, on the other hand, not to be behindhand in magnanimity, has been racking her brains to recollect an authentic great-grandfather. Le Mesurier has done his best to dissuade his beloved from coming to wave her pocket handkerchief after him as he

sails away from St. Malo, but in vain. "It will be too much for you!—it will upset you!" he has said, tenderly, but she has answered with a wilful smile and shake of the head :

"Nothing ever upsets me, except not getting my own way; *that* has always injured my health, from my youth up."

So he is silenced, and has perforce to submit, with what grace he can, to the prospect of what he most dreads on the earth's face—a scene, and being publicly cried over.

Still he makes one struggle more against his fate. "I hate saying 'good-bye'—do not you, Scrope?" he says that night to his friend, as they sit on the hotel steps smoking, under the yellow moon, which in her third quarter looks odd and three-cornered.

"I hate saying anything, this weather," replies Scrope, languidly. "I should like

to keep a little boy to make remarks for me, and they would chiefly be requests for iced drinks.”

“Suppose,” continues Paul, “that we give *them*” (indicating, with a motion of his head, the direction where he supposes Jemima and Lenore to be) “the slip, and start by the early train to-morrow morning: I have been looking, and there is one at 6.40.”

“Start !” echoes Scrope, with more energy than he had any idea that the hot weather had left him, holding his cigar between two fingers, and looking reproachfully at his friend. “Your sole ideas of the pleasures of travelling are ‘starting’ and ‘arriving;’ the sole enjoyment you have in a landscape is tracing where the railway runs. My dear fellow, I have already an indigestion of trains, boats, diligences; I have as much idea of starting by the early train as the late train, and the

late train as the early train. I mean, D.V., *never* to start again."

"No more would I, if I could help it," replies Paul, gloomily. "I have naturally more cause to wish to stay than you, but when one has a father, and that father has the gout——"

"Gout *is* apt to make parents insubordinate," says Scrope, coolly; "but you see" (in a tone rather self-gratulatory than regretful) "I have no father, and there is no reason why I should get up in the middle of the night because *you* have one."

"You do not mean to come home yet, then?" exclaims Paul, in a tone in which surprise and suspicion contend for mastery.

Scrope turns his head half away. "Why, no—I think not; I expect to be a sadder and a wiser man by the time I next see the chalk cliffs of Albion."

A few moments of silence. Scrope picks up a pebble, and aims it at the landlord's

poodle, which, at once dirty and ridiculous, and happily unconscious of being either, is trotting bravely along, with his shorn tail borne gallantly aloft.

“ Which route do you mean to follow ? ” asks Le Mesurier, presently, with hardly so much of confidential friendship in his voice as there was when the conversation first began. “ Strike across country from here to Napoléonville, or go round by Auray and Carnac ? ”

Scrope does not seem in any hurry to answer. “ I do not think I shall follow any route at all,” he says at length, slowly, and looking rather guilty. “ Walking tours ” (beginning to laugh) “ wear out boots in a way that I cannot justify to myself.”

“ What are you thinking of doing with yourself, then ? ” rather austerely.

“ How do I know ? ” says Scrope, wearily and yawning ; “ do I ever know ? ”

I shall probably go wherever the wind blows me, like a dead leaf."

"A most apt simile," says Paul, with a dry look at the healthy solidity of his companion's tall figure, and of the legs, at which he is at the present moment pensively gazing. "Cannot you give a guess as to the direction in which your attenuated person is likely to be wafted?"

"Not the slightest," replies Scrope, nonchalantly; then, with a boyish blush: "to Dinan, perhaps."

"To Dinan!" cries Paul, sharply, looking thoroughly and unaffectedly and most angrily jealous. "What on earth should take you back there?"

"Did not I tell you just now—the wind?" replies the other.

Paul rises, unable to conceal his ill-temper, and, not willing to indulge it, begins to walk hastily up and down before the hotel door. Scrope draws himself lazily

up from his sitting posture, and languidly walks to join his friend.

“My dear Paul,” he says, coldly, and yet smiling, “if you had not been so completely taken up with your own little game—so brutally selfish and self-absorbed as lovers always are, you might have perceived that I too have a little game.”

“What *are* you talking about?”

“My good fellow, do not look as if you were going to run your nose through my body,” says Scrope, with a rather unkind allusion to the saliency of *one* feature of his friend’s face. “What I mean is this : while you have been amusing yourself making love to the *young* Miss Herrick, *I* have been laying siege to the *old* one. It has been rather uphill work, as she did not seem to understand the situation ; but I hope, by God’s grace, to make her see my drift in time.”

“My dear boy,” taking his arm, but still

looking half unbelieving, "she is old enough to be your grandmother!"

"I know she is; that is why I like her. You know you have often accused me of a depraved taste for old women. I own it; I like them *mellow*."

Paul laughs, but not very merrily.

"So you see," continues Scrope, "so far from *my* helping you to evade your 'good-byes,' you have a harrowing parting with *me too* to look forward to."

"I wish to heaven it was over!" says Paul, devoutly. "I would give any one ten pounds to get me clear off, without saying 'good-bye' to any one. But," with a sigh, "you see, Lenore," the name does not come very glibly yet, "seems to have set her heart on seeing one off."

"You ungrateful dog!" cries Scrope, with an indignation none the less real, because affected to be feigned. "Why *will* the Gods always cast their pearls before

swine? Would to heaven that any handsome woman would set her heart upon seeing *me* off! I should be the last to oppose her.”

“It would show how little you cared about her, then,” replies the other, briefly; and then, ashamed and afraid of having been demonstrative, walks away into the hotel.





CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

SO Lenore has her wish ! and together they all retrace their steps, and journey back to St. Malo. And now the heavy parting day has come—the day that is to interpose the cold grey sea between him and her. There are but three hours now till the moment when Paul will set forth on his return to old associations, to the strong influences of use and wont, leaving Brittany and new love behind him. All morning they have been strolling about the old

town and the ramparts, two-and-two—the lovers and the playing-at-lovers. Judging by appearances, the latter seem to be enjoying themselves the most.

By-and-by Lenore and her betrothed stray away from the others, across the sands, that twice a day the tide's long wash covers and twice a day again uncovers; across the sands to the little bare island where Châteaubriand—in no graveyard, hustled by no dead kin—has willed to sleep out his last sleep. They have climbed through the sands and the sand-coloured bents to the little eminence, where, with no name graved upon them, no date, no valedictory text, stand the simple white cross and slab that mark the spot where the restless René lies. On the very edge of the precipice he is sleeping, and beneath him the rocks slant sheer down, and at their base come the stealing summer waves with a slow soft lapping. Lenore leans on

the railings that Châteaubriand begged his fellow-townsmen to place round his tomb, "*pour empêcher les animaux à me deterrer*," and stands looking seaward, parted-lipped, tasting the salt wind.

"Jemima will be very clever if she gets Scrope up here," says Paul, with a determination to say something very commonplace, in the hope of ridding himself of the sense of sad solemnity that the place, the sighing wind, and his own approaching parting, combine to produce.

"She will not try," answers Lenore, not changing her attitude. "*Jemima hates 'Atala,' and she loves limpets, and little crabs, and all sorts of noisome monsters of the deep. If Mr. Scrope were not with her, she would take off her shoes and stockings, and paddle.*"

"Scrope would *paddle* too, on the smallest encouragement," says Paul, laughing; "just the sort of thing that would suit him—cool,

and no trouble; and besides, he tells me that he is very much smitten with Jemima."

Lenore turns away her large eyes from her abstracted contemplation of the purple waves and the glancing sea-gulls; turns them on Paul, full of a sort of careless surprise. "Unhappy young man," she says, calmly; "what could have induced him to tell such a shocking story?"

"Why might not it be true?"

"It might," says Lenore, indifferently, "but it is not. Mr. Scrope—Charlie Scrope, is not he? he looks like Charlie—is no more smitten with Jemima than he is with—— Who shall I say?"

"Than with *you*!"

"Well, than with *me*, if you like."

"You do not seem to think that that is putting it very strongly," says Paul, suspiciously. 22

"What does it matter whom he is smitten with, or whom he is not?" cries Lenore

with evasive vehemence. "What does it matter whether he is alive or dead? We have only two hours left, and we are wasting our time talking about *him*."

"I am, naturally, rather interested in my successor in walks and talks, and moonlight strolls," says Paul, with a bitter jest.

"Is not he going to set off to-morrow on that ever-talked-about, and never-walked walking tour?" asks Lenore, surprised. "I thought he was, but I suppose 'the wish was father to the thought.'"

"Walking-tour, indeed!" says Paul, scornfully, "I know what *that* means: lying at your feet under the chestnuts at Mont Parnasse, and reading Byron and Shelley to you!"

"Being read aloud to always sends me to sleep."

"Promise me" (looking very eager) "asleep or awake, not to flirt with him."

"I will promise nothing so ridiculous,"

answers she, contemptuously. “ *Flirt* with an *infant*, that gets red all over when I speak to it!—that trembles and stammers when I remark to it that ‘ It is a hot day !’ Bah !”

“ It is a singular fact,” says Paul, drily, “ that it is only in *your* society that *it* blushes, and trembles, and stammers ; most people find it a brazen-faced and fluent infant enough.”

“ Do they ?”

“ You will, at all events, promise not to let *it*” (laughing) “ read poetry to you ?—for it is a handsome fellow and a sentimental.”

“ *Can* it read ?” (with an air of surprise). “ I should have thought it had not got beyond B—a, ba, B—e, be, B—i, bi, B—o, bo, B—u, bu——”

“ Lenore,” says Paul, very gravely, “ however you may choose to ignore the fact, you know as well as I do, that Scrope is a grown man, and a disgustingly good-

looking one. Swear to me to be as little alone with him as possible—swear to me not to flirt with him !”

“ Make me swear not to give him a pop-gun or play ‘ tip-cat ’ with him ! It would be much more rational,” answers Lenore, derisively. (Paul turns away.) “ Do not be vexed,” she cries, very gravely, laying her hand on his arm. “ If it will give you the least grain of pleasure I will promise to cut him out-and-out, henceforth and for ever. I will not even say ‘ Good morning ’ and ‘ Good evening ’ to him. Do you think it would be any privation to me ? Set me some *harder* task—something difficult and disagreeable to do—against you come back, for your sake ! Perhaps it will make the enormous days go a little quicker.” Her eyes fill with tears as she speaks ; the seagulls scream and Paul sighs heavily. “ I hope it is not a bad omen,” she says, winking away the drops from her curled lashes ;

"but you are the first person or thing that ever succeeded in making me cry. I never *could* cry over books, or at plays, or when people died : I did not know that I had any tears about me, till I met you."

"Lenore !" (half indignantly, half hurt,) "what a more than doubtful compliment !"

"I will never pay it you again," she says, with confident, hopefulness. "Henceforth, my life will be all plain sailing : I see it as clearly as that shining wake of yellow light behind the steamer out there. You must tell your father" (speaking between joke and earnest) "that no one has ever thwarted or contradicted me all my life, and that he must please to follow suit."

Paul smiles rather sadly, and shakes his head : "I am afraid he would answer that neither has any one ever thwarted or contradicted him all his life, and that *you* must please to follow suit."

A pause.

“What is there so obnoxious about me?” cries Lenore, suddenly turning away from the grave, and facing her lover with a flushed proud face. “Why should he object to me so strongly, as I see you think he will?”

“God knows! Perhaps he will not! Who can answer for the freaks of a man possessed by the twin devils of gout and Calvin?”

“I have no money, certainly; but neither have nine-tenths of the women that men marry, and no one thinks of getting up to forbid the banns.”

“Quite true.”

“I come of a good and a healthy stock: we never run away with our neighbours’ wives, or have D. T., or go mad.”

“That is more than I can say for us! At least, we do not go cracked; but we occasionally indulge in the other two pastimes you mentioned.”

" I am not a flirt."

" No ?" (more interrogatively than assentingly).

" Nor fast."

" No—o," (rather slowly and doubtfully).

" I am *not* fast," she repeats, stoutly ;
" how *can* I be ? I do not hunt ; I do not drink hock and seltzer for breakfast ; I do not *smoke*."

" Good heavens, I should hope not !"

" Make me out as nice as you can to your people, even at the expense of strict veracity," says Lenore, coaxingly. " Indeed" (with a little air of complacency), " by softening a shadow here and striking out a light there, I really describe very well."

" Even without that process," says Paul, with a proud smile.

" For instance," continues she, with a deepened colour and a shamed though defiant laugh, " you need not enter into detail

with regard to the peculiar circumstances that attended our first meeting.

"I should think not!" (very much accented).

"I do not see what necessity there is for so much emphasis," rejoins Lenore, rather offended; "it was a bad joke, because, thanks to Frederic's imbecility and your straightlacedness, it failed. If you had been a different kind of man, and it had succeeded, it would have been a good one."

"Good or bad," says Paul, with a promising forestalling of marital authority in his voice, "I shall be very much obliged if you will not repeat it while I am away, Lenore."

For a moment she looks mutinous; then, at the sight of the green sea, the steamers, and the thoughts that both suggest, melts utterly. "I will not—I will not!" she cries, eagerly. "Do you think I shall have time for jokes? I shall spend all my days

and all my nights in trying to be a really nice girl, by the time you come back. A really nice girl," she repeats, dreamily. "I have been called a tall girl, and an odious girl, and a sharp girl, and now and then a deuced handsome girl ; but never to my recollection, in all my life, have I been called a nice girl."

"Poor Lenore !" (stroking her bright hair,) "strange to say, you have at last found some one to think you nice."

"Have I?" (looking quite at sea). "Who?"

"Who? Why *I*, to be sure."

"*You !*" (shaking her head). "Oh no, you do not."

It is a flat contradiction ; but it does not sound rude. He does not asseverate. Bewitching, charming, maddening—she is all these ; but "*nice*" ? The epithet has a domestic, home-keeping, quiet sound, that does not seem to fit her.

"I must practise being lady-like, and

gentle, and sweet, against I see your people, or these virtues will sit as uneasily on me as an ill-made cloak," she says, with a rather anxious laugh.

"Do not be in any hurry to see my people," cries Paul, hastily. "I am not. I had far rather keep you to myself."

"Would you? Do you know," (taking his hand, and smiling softly,) "I have been vexing myself with the thought that, try as I may, I *never* can give you *all* my life? There must always remain eighteen years in which you have had neither part nor lot, and in which other men have. I cannot, indeed," (laughing a little) "accuse myself of having ever been *over* civil to your sex; but once I gave a man a bunch of violets, and once I got up at five o'clock in the morning to see another man off to India. I daresay you have done many worse things, but I do not believe they can weigh on your mind half so much?"

"For Heaven's sake do not let us compare notes!" says Paul, with a hasty flush, while his mental eye flashes back over the occupations of his grown-up years. "I do not want to make you believe that I have been worse than other men, and I have not Lawrence's idea, that, by being superlatively immoral, one is more likely to win a good woman's love; but still" (sighing) "beside your sweet white life, mine looks black enough. Let us cry quits, Lenore, and make a fresh start. If you stick to me I swear to you that, for the future, mine shall be as white as yours."

"We shall be like two lilies on one stalk," says Lenore, with levity; but her eyes are wet.

After all, it is Paul that sees Lenore off, and not Lenore Paul. The Dinan boat starts several hours before the Southampton one. The bitter "Good-bye," has really come. The passengers are stepping on

board, and seating themselves in the bows and on the rickety camp-stools on the hatchways. Three old Frenchwomen are chattering together, asking each other whether they are not *fatigué par le vent ?* Black smoke is pouring out of the little black funnel ; the paddle-boxes, black and white [like magpies—bird hateful to the French soul—contrast the green water that they rest on. A devoted Breton *père de famille* is returning to his home with three red and yellow paper twirligigs in his hand ; evidently his offspring number three.

“ For God’s sake do not forget me, Paul ! ” Lenore is saying, in a low broken voice. She has one of her lover’s hands tight held in both hers ; her face is as white as death, and the tears are pouring down it. She has never much regard for appearances, and she is entirely reckless of them now ; in a waterproof, quite down to her

heels, she looks like a young Grenadier—only, surely, never had Grenadier so wet and woebegone a face. “ Think of me *every* minute, even if you think something disagreeable. Oh, if I had but some one to talk of me to you ! But I have not—no one ; you will never hear my name, or, if anyone does mention it, they will say no good of me : nobody ever does !”

“ My dearest child, do not talk such nonsense !” says Paul hastily, casting a furtive glance round to see whether any one is laughing. He is very miserable himself, but he is not quite so much swallowed up by his grief as not to retain an uneasy curiosity as to whether their pretty *pose* does not afford mirth matter to their fellow voyagers. He catches the stoker, who has just come up, streaming with perspiration and black as night, from the lower regions, *flagrante delicto*. He is smiling, and nudging a neighbour. Mr.

Le Mesurier relieves his mind by scowling at him.

“ I cannot stand this much longer,” says Scrope in a suppressed voice, to Jemima. Mr. Scrope is unable to keep quiet ; he is turning red and pale, and biting his lips. “ It really is too sickening. These ceremonies ought to be strictly private, or altogether omitted. Do not you think so, Miss Herrick ?”

“ Do not look that way,” says Jemima, drily.

“ I cannot help it ; there is a sort of horrible fascination. Thank God, there’s the bell ! Miss Jemima, why the——why, I mean, does no one ever cry over *me* ?”

“ You are not going away ?”

“ But if I were, who would ? I never caused any one’s tears to flow in my life, except my small brother’s, when I licked him at school.”

“ Be a good girl, Lenore, and *do not flirt*

with Scrope ! These are my last words to you. God bless you, my darling !”

Paul has at last forgotten the rest of the company ; the stoker may laugh his fill ; he sees nothing but Lenore’s drowned blue eyes, and his own are not far from matching them.

And in this fashion they part.

END OF MORNING.



P A R T II.



N O O N.

“ And in the eye of noon, my love
 Shall lead me from my mother's door,
Sweet boys and girls, all clothed in white,
 Strewing flowers before.

“ But first the nodding minstrels go,
 With music meet for lordly bow'rs :
The children next, in snow-white vests,
 Strewing buds and flowers.

“ And then my love and I shall pace,
 My jet-black hair in pearly braids,
Between our comely bachelors
 And blushing bridal maids.”



CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

ARE you of those who hate Winter, or of those who love him? Do you shrink from his strong ice-clasp; or do you hold out your right hand to him heartily, saying, "You are welcome?" Do you love the enjoyments that are to be fought for (so to speak) by effort and exertion, with quick blood and high pulses; or those that come lazily and warmly, without your seeking? To whichever class you belong, you must come with me into Winter's innermost stronghold. I bid you;

and, shiver and shake as you may, you must not say “ No.” Forget June—forget its hot faint airs and thronged red roses ; remember only December, with all his cold white train. It is Christmas : a season which, if one took one’s idea of it from Dickens’ books, would seem to be a season of universal jollity, of widely-diffused sausages and mince-pies, of great crackling fires and hard bright frost ; when every one is gladder than his wont ; when each man greets his neighbour lovingly, and godly charity and pious mirth shine out of each happy eye ;—a season which, if one judge it by one’s own experience, is for the most part mildly drizzling—a season of bills and influenza triumphant ; when one reckons up the empty chairs by the fireside, and, counting over one’s losses in love and joy, finds smiling—much more broad laughter—but difficult. Into an English country-house you must come : till to-morrow you

must wait to see whether it is Gothic, Tudor, Ionic, Inigo Jones-ish, or a happy medley of these styles ; for now the black night-winds are feeling blindly round it, and the harsh rains are lashing its front. It is dressing-time ; but who can bear to tear themselves away from this hall-fire—hall that is the liveablest room in the house, with its floor spread with warm beasts' skins, its low wide hearth, its thick-draped windows, its round table groaning under new novels — novels proper and novels improper ; novels Ritualistic and novels Evangelical ; novels that are milk for babes, and novels that are almost too strong meat for men. There are no gone faces to sadden this hearth ; the only face that is gone would cause considerable consternation were it to come back again. On the deep woolly hearthrug Jemima is sitting, with a book in her hand ; she is reading a pretty love-story by the firelight. Opposite

to her, in a low chair, sits (or rather *lies*) her sister Sylvia, the widowed house-mistress. Her little chin is buried in her chest ; the large jet beetles in her ears bob gently to and fro as she nods, nods ; on her lap rests a pug dog. His face is blacker than the raven's wing ; his nose turns mightily upward ; his tail curls tightly twice to the left ; his toes turn out, and his tongue protrudes, like a pink rose-leaf ; if he squinted he would be perfect ; but, alas ! life is made up of “ ifs.” A little farther off, two young people are playing at *béziq*ue—Lenore and Scrope. Yes, though it is neither Brittany nor June, Scrope is here. Twining round his legs, scaling Jemima's back, playfully trying to poke their fingers into their mother's shut eyes, running heavily on their heels, plunging, wrangling, with all the innocent vivacity of chidhood, are two *enfants terribles*—terrible as only the healthy male young of the human species can be—little red-faced

scourges to society. If parents, when they give their children smart names, would but reflect on the number of ugly-named men whom they may possibly, nay probably, espouse! Why did not Sylvia's parents? Sylvia Prodgers!

"Is these children's bedtime *never* coming?" cries Lenore, impatiently, as she begins a fresh deal. "It seems to me that that blest epoch moves further and further on every night. Tommy, dear, are not you sleepy? I will give you sixpence if you will say you are."

"Mother said we might stay up to see Uncle Paul—did not she, Bobby?" replies Tommy, triumphantly. He has just succeeded in tying himself in a true-love knot round Mr. Scrope's neck; his feet are beating a playful yet painful tattoo on that young gentleman's ribs.

"*Uncle* Paul, indeed!" cries Scrope, indignantly. "Who taught you to give

people brevet rank ? I say, young man, fair-play is a jewel. Let *me* get on *your* back, and hammer *your* ribs a bit now.”

“Stay up to see Uncle Paul,” echoes Bobby, who, not being very rich in ideas himself, draws chiefly on his elder brother’s stock.

“How pleased he’ll be !” says Scrope, laughing. “I think I see the benignant smile with which he will greet you, when you run at his legs and kick his shins, as you are in the pleasant habit of doing to mine.”

“He will not mind,” says Lenore, feeling impelled to stand up for her lover’s amiability. “I hate children myself, as you know—*loathe* them, in fact. They seem to me to combine all the worst qualities of both sexes, with *no* redeeming points of their own—egotism more than man’s, garrulity more than woman’s. But I always like a man to be fond of them ;

there is always some good about a man that is."

"I wish they were not quite so fond of me," says Scrope, groaning, as he takes Tommy by the scruff of the neck, and deposits him in a vociferous heap on the floor.

"Uncle Paul is going to be Aunt Lenore's 'usband—Morris says so" (Morris is the butler), remarks Bobby from the background, with that utter contempt for the letter *h* that one often notices in little children.

"Quite right, Bobby," answers Lenore, gaily; "Morris never said a truer word in all his life."

Scrope makes no comment; he only throws four kings viciously on the table, and announces in a sulky voice the unanswerable proposition that 80 and 70 make 150.

"I wish Aunt Lenore's 'usband would

come,” says Lenore, laughing, but rather anxiously. “ I *feel* as if it were getting very late. Jemima, you can see the clock ; what time is it ?”

Jemima starts, drops her book, and stretches her neck. “ Five minutes past seven.”

“ He *ought* to be here, ought not he ?” says the girl, wistfully, playing a queen of trumps that she has been carefully hoarding for the last ten minutes, and looking inquiringly across at her antagonist.

“ Perhaps he has thought better of it,” suggests Scrope, in his slow lazy way. “ Perhaps his pretty cousin has persuaded him to stay and eat his plumpudding with her.”

“ He has *not* a pretty cousin,” answers Lenore, quickly, and quite unaware that she has double bézique in her hand.

“ He has, though,” replies Scrope, carelessly, looking doubtfully over his cards, to

see which he can best spare. "He may have kept it dark, but he has. I saw her last month, when I went down there for covert-shooting. She had on a grey cloak down to her heels, and a long poke-bonnet like a tunnel; but I looked down the tunnel, and saw a pretty little prim face at the end of it."

"She was a Sister of Mercy, no doubt."

"Only a lay one."

"I *wish* he would come," repeats poor Lenore, feverishly. "Children, run to the window, and listen if you can hear a carriage."

"You must remember it is Christmas Eve," says Jemima, reassuringly; "the trains are often three hours late."

"Everybody drunk, and collisions imminently probable," remarks Scrope, pleasantly.

Lenore flings down her cards on the table, and, running to the window, dis-

appears behind the heavy red curtains with the children.

" My word, Bobby, is not it raining ?"

" He is *not* to get up upon the window-seat, is he, Aunty Lenore ?"

" Yes, I may ; mayn't I ?"

" Aunty Lenore, is not he a naughty boy ?"

" You *shall not* get up here ; I won't have you !"

A sound of hustling—a fall—a howl. Scrope to the rescue.

Unmindful of her nephews, Lenore is standing, with her nose flattened against the pane, staring out into the rough night. The clouds are breaking, and from underneath one heavy black one, the moon is pushing and pouring wet silver ; it streams on Lenore's eager face, making it look extra pale. The children tumble back, over one another again, into the warm room : in the dark recess behind the curtain the

young man and the young woman stand alone.

“Do you think there has been an *accident*?” asks the girl, in a low voice, turning to him her pretty tragic face. “Do you think anything has happened to him?”

“I am *certain* nothing has,” answers the young fellow, bitterly turning on his heel.

In ten minutes more, doubt as to Mr. Le Mesurier's fate is at an end, and Lenore's nose may recover from the pressure it has suffered against the window-pane as soon as it can. Through the bellowing wind and the fighting rain carriage-wheels are plainly heard, and a bell's sharp “Ting, ting,” vibrates through the house.

“How about the pretty cousin and the poke-bonnet?” cries the girl, her face all alight, flying triumphantly past Scrope into the outer hall.

“Wait a bit; perhaps he has brought her with him.”

But Lenore is out of hearing.

"Why could not she stay here?" says the young man, advancing, grumbling and shivering, to the fire. "It would not have robbed her of two seconds of his precious society. Why do not they come in?" (walking impatiently to and fro). "I suppose they are falling into each other's arms under the chaperonage of Morris. Bah! I hate lovers! Do not you, Miss Herrick?"

"I never had one, so I cannot say."

The bell has awoken both Sylvia and her dog. The latter tumbles down, in a fat fawn-coloured ball, from his mistress's lap. The former stands sleepily up, and mechanically puts her hand to her head, to feel for her plaits.

"Is he come?" she says, in a little plaintive voice. "I wish people would not come so suddenly—they make one's heart beat so. Jemima," (standing on tiptoe, and

trying to get a glimpse of her little head, and of the mountainous hair-erection that makes it look top-heavy, in the looking-glass over the high old chimneypiece)—“Jemima, does my *frisette* show? Do I look a great object? What will he think of me?”

“It does show a good deal,” answers Jemima, candidly. “But do not be uneasy; he will not *see* you—he never sees anybody when Lenore is by; ten to one he will forget to say ‘How do you do?’ to you!”

“What—to the mistress of the house!” cries Scrope, with his eyes eagerly fixed on the door.

“I hope he will not expect one to be very affectionate,” continues Sylvia, simpering; too entirely taken up with herself to hear or heed Jemima’s remark, and carefully patting down the little Gainsborough fringe of hair on her forehead. “I suppose I am peculiar, but I always feel so *reserved*

with strangers ; if he is hurt by my coldness, you must explain to him that it is *my way*."

"I do not think there will be any need," replies Jemima, drily.

As she speaks the door opens, and the betrothed pair make their triumphal entry. To Lenore, at least, it is such : her two hands are clasped on her lover's arm, and her glad proud eyes are fixed on his face. It is not much of a face to be proud of, after all ; but, such as it is, sisters, nephews, friend, butler, footmen, are quite welcome to see her radiant happiness in again looking upon it. Paul is happy too—inly, heartfely happy ; but, coming in straight from a long December railway journey, only just delivered from the wind's cuffs and the rain's stings, shivering and shy, it is difficult to look radiant. Paul's shyness, like that of many other men's, takes the form of a peculiar ferocity of aspect. Sylvia

has arranged herself in a pretty *pose*; she has disposed all her neat little features symmetrically into a smile of welcome: Bobby and Tommy, awed into momentary silence and stillness by the stranger's advent, are filially grouped around her.

"So happy to make your acquaintance!" she murmurs, extending her hand, and then dropping her eyes bashfully.—
"Darlings, give Mr. Le Mesurier a nice kiss!"

But the darlings—whose *mauvaise honte*, on first introduction, is only to be exceeded by their painful intimacy at a later stage of acquaintance—burrow their coy heads in their mother's skirts, and decline. As kissing is with them a damp and open-mouthed process, perhaps their future uncle has the less reason to deplore their refusal. He shakes hands with them all—unknown sister-in-law, known sister-in-law, nephews-in-law, friend (with the last perhaps with

less warmth than the rest); and then they stand round the fire, and say clever things about the rain and the wind, and the train and the dog-cart. These do not last long, however, and when they are finished, a rather constrained silence falls.

“So some one has been playing *béziq*ue, I see?” remarks Paul, with an effort to break through the silence and his own shyness at the same time.

“Yes,” answers Lenore, laconically, not thinking it necessary to explain who the players were.

“It is Mr. Scrope and Aunty Lenore,” cries Tommy, officiously; “they play every night, and one night Bobby spilt the cards all over the floor. My word! did not Aunty Lenore smack him!”

“Play *every* night!” echoes Paul, glancing quickly from his love to Mr. Scrope, and back again; “I had no idea that you had been here any time, Scrope?”

“About the inside of a week, I suppose,” answers Scrope, nonchalantly.

“Why, you *knew* he had!” cries Lenore, reproachfully. “I told you so ages ago.—It shows”—turning to the company with a rather nervous laugh) “how attentively he reads my letters, does not it?”

“Her hand *is* difficult, is not it?” says Sylvia, sweetly. “We all write illegible hands; I am shockingly scolded about mine.”

Mr. Le Mesurier does not seem very much interested as to whether his hostess’s hand is decipherable or not; he walks to the card-table, and begins to fiddle with the bézique-markers.

“I do not know what anyone else thinks,” says Jemima, depositing her novel on the table; “but *I* think that it is quite time to prepare for the great event of the day.—Mr. Scrope, will you light my candle?”

They all troop off up the lit stairs—women, children, man; Lenore and Paul are left for the first time alone. In a moment they are together, standing on the hearthrug: her face is between his two cold hands, and he is looking down on it, with an expression a little troubled, perhaps, but as truly, heartily loving as even she could desire.

"Lenore, have you been a good girl?"

"Paul, have you been a good man?"

"Middling for that" (sighing), "but I think I have tried."

"And I think *I* have tried to be a good girl, but I am not at all sure that I have succeeded."

"And Scrope?"

"Has *he* been a good man, do you mean? I really cannot say."

"You know I do not mean that, Lenore; but what about him?"

"*Nothing* about him."

“Do you think him as much of a child as you did that day at St. Malo?”

“No, I do not; I think he is rather precocious.”

* * * * *

Soup is apt to make the nose red, but after a long winter journey it is certainly solacing. It does not matter whether Paul has a red nose or no, as he has no beauty to spoil; nor (owing, I suppose to the deeper-colouredness of their whole faces) is a red nose as absolutely fatal to men's loveliness as to women's. Sylvia's sherry is good; so is her champagne. Paul does not seem half so shy, or half so cold, as he did an hour ago. Why should he be, either, sitting near this kingly Christmas fire, that one sees, without feeling it oppressively, through the glass screen, and among all these kindly smiling faces? Sylvia smiles on principle, because her teeth are white and even. Jemima smiles from habit: in this world it

is politer to smile than to look grave. Scrope smiles, because dinner is involuntarily cheering, even when one's heart is sick, and angry to the pitch of longing to knock *anybody* down. And Lenore—neither soup nor sherry have power to add to her perfect well-being. Indeed she cannot eat. She has had plenty of time to eat and sleep, and go through all the dull necessities of life, during the last void six months. Lenore is *absolutely* happy ! It is something to have been able once to say that ; but why do not people know *when* to die ? Why does life insist on staying on :

“ Like some poor nigh-related guest,
That may not rudely be dismissed,
But hath outstayed his welcome while
And tells the jest without the smile ? ”

“ So your father has been having the gout ? ” says the girl, considerately waiting till her lover has swallowed his last mouthful of soup, and not “ starving her man,”

as the *Saturday*, in the long-gone days when it used to write pleasant articles, once happily worded it.

“Yes.”

“Quite *safely* and *long-livedly*, I suppose?”

Paul looks rather shocked; he has not yet had time to get acclimatised to Lenore’s startling candours of expression :

“I hope so.”

“Is he very cross?”

“Very.”

“Gout is apt to sour the sweetest temper, as no one has better reason to know than I,” says Sylvia, with a sigh, and a downward glance at her dress.

Sylvia’s grief had passed out of the capped and crape stage; it has declined into the more supportable phase of corded silks and white tuckers.

“Would he like me to go and nurse

him ? ” asks Lenore, laughing, yet eagerly awaiting the answer.

“ I do not know about that,” says Paul, laughing too ; “ he has already *three* lone spirits for his ministers. I do not think even *he* could find work for a fourth.”

“ Three ! ” cries the girl, growing pink, with a faint suspicion. “ Why, Paul, I thought you had only *two* sisters ! ”

“ Suppose I have a cousin ? ”

Lenore involuntarily glances across at Scrope : he is smiling malevolently, and reciting, half under his breath :

“ I have brothers and sisters by the dozen, Tom ;
But a *cousin* is a different thing.”

Nothing has happened : the fire still radiates warmth from its deep red heart. The footmen are carrying round sweetbreads, and fricandeaus, and timbales, and all manner of nice things. Sylvia and Jemima are still smiling, but yet—but yet—Lenore has made one step, a very little step in-

deed, but still a step, down from her pinnacle of heavenlike bliss.

* * * * *

“ I *quite* like him, Lenore—I do really. I am not joking,” says Sylvia that evening, patronizingly, as the three ladies stand round the drawing-room fire : “ and you know I am not one to say what I do not mean. If I have a fault in that way, it is being too sincere. I had my misgivings, but he really is *quite* nice ; but—but—what an odd way he has of *staring* at one !”

“ I never remarked it.”

“ I thought he looked rather queer when I called Charlie Scrope ‘ Charlie ’ at dinner,” continues Sylvia, sinking down upon the fender-stool, and carefully disposing her skirts about her. “ You must explain to him that poor dear Charlie is one of my *oldest* friends. I hate people to get that sort of idea about one into their heads, don’t you know ?”



CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

“ Babe Jesus lay on Mary’s lap,
The sun shone in His hair ;
And so it was she saw, mayhap,
The crown already there.

“ For she sang, ‘ Sleep on, my little King,
Bad Herod dares not come ;
Before Thee sleeping, holy thing,
Wild winds would soon be dumb.

“ ‘ I kiss Thy hands, I kiss Thy feet,
My King, so long desired ;
Thy hands shall never be soiled, my sweet,
Thy feet shall never be tired.

“ ‘ For thou art the King of men, my Son !
Thy crown I see it plain,
And men shall worship Thee, every one,
And cry Glory ! Amen !’

“Babe Jesus opened his eyes so wide
At Mary looked her Lord ;
And Mary stinted her song and sighed,
Babe Jesus said never a word.”

NOBODY sings those old carols nowadays ; but to me they have a heartier, truer ring than any of the newfangled Christmas psalmodes. Yes—it is Christmas Day, though there is neither snow, nor frost, nor ice : only stripped trees, a chilly little sun, and mild west-wind. Everybody has been to church, has prayed, has crossed his arms, and yawned ; has stared at the hollied font and the ivied pillars, at the blue and red and gold texts, that tell us the old, old news, that “Christ is born ;” has thought of his earthly accounts, and of his account with High God, as the bent of his mind inclines him. Tommy has dropped his mother’s smart Prayer Book into a puddle on his way to church ; has been hoisted up on the

seat, on his arrival there ; has made faces at a little girl in the next pew ; has broken into audible laughter during the Second Lesson, at something that tickled his fancy in one of the footmen's appearance ; has been privately admonished that expulsion from church, and deprivation of pudding, will be the consequence of continued mirth ; has therefore lapsed into tearful gravity, and finally into sleep. Now they are all at home again : Lenore and Paul have succeeded in the object—always a primary one with lovers—of eluding every one else, and are dawdling about in the conservatory till the luncheon-gong shall summon them back into the control of the public eye. The formal camellias—the Roman matrons, Cornelias and Lucretias, of the flower nation—hide no ears under their sleek dark leaves ; the jonquils, whose gold throats are so full of sweets, tell no tales.

“ I never saw you in a frock-coat and

tall hat before," says Lenore, playfully surveying her lover from head to heel; "turn slowly round, that I may judge of the *tout ensemble*."

"Nor I you in a bonnet."

"You have seen me, however, in a *cap*," returns Lenore, with a mischievous smile.

Paul looks a little grave.

"Do not abuse it!" cries the girl, laughing. "With all its misdemeanours, it was a *blessed* cap, and I have a good mind to be married in it."

"Lenore, I *hate* that episode!"

"Do you? Well, then, we will dig a hole and bury it: all the same" (sighing a little), "though I am a great deal *gooder* than I was, I am not yet good enough to regret it."

"*Are* you 'gooder' than you were?" (with a fond but rather incredulous smile).

"Do not you think so?" she asks

eagerly. "Have not you remarked it? Do not you think I am improved?"

Paul is a little puzzled; he has not been here four-and-twenty hours yet, but, as far as he sees, she is the very identical Lenore that he left sobbing on the deck of the St. Malo steamer. She is not sobbing now, and, instead of a waterproof, she is clad in a smart winter-gown and a bonnet with a feather; but, for the rest, he sees no change.

"Have you heard me say anything fast?" asks Lenore, growing serious.

"No."

"Or slang?"

"No."

"Or seen me get into one of my rages?"

"No," answers Paul, half laughing at the idea of the self-control implied by keeping out of a rage during eighteen hours, of which seven were spent in sleep,

and the rest in the company of a favoured and adoring lover.

“Have you heard me snub *Jemima*?”

“No.”

“Or seen me box *Tommy’s* ears?”

“No.”

“Well, then, I *must* be improved,” cries *Lenore*, triumphantly; “for I can tell you, you could not have spent an hour in my society this time last year without seeing me go through some of those manœuvres.”

“Well, then, you *are* improved,” answers *Paul*, smiling, and smoothing her shining hair; “and we all know there was room for it, do not we?”

“Plenty,” replies *Lenore*, briefly.

“All the same, I did not think you needed much mending that last day at *St. Malo*,” says *Paul*, indulging himself in looking as thoroughly sentimental as even *Scrope* could have done, now that he is sure that nobody is by.

"You prefer me with my nose swelled and my eyes bunged up, do you?" asks Lenore, gaily. "Good heavens!" (growing quite grave), "how I hated everybody and everything that day—Chateaubriand and his tomb, and the ramparts, and the old houses, and the steamer, and the stoker, and Jemima! Do you know, I cried *all* the way back to Dinan? I do not think I stopped for one minute, and Jemima and Mr. Scrope sat on two camp-stools opposite to me. They did not look at the view, and they did not look at the other people; they kept staring at me the whole way. What possessed them I cannot think."

"I wish I had been there," says Mr. Le Mesurier, looking rather vicious; "I would have turned Jemima's camp-stool straight round, and kicked Scrope overboard."

"And what would he have been doing meanwhile?" asks Lenore, archly. "Poor

Mr. Scrope ! *how* bored I was by him those first few days after you went !”

“ The *first* days !” echoes Paul, suspiciously. “ You were not bored by him *afterwards*, then ?”

She does not answer immediately, and he has to repeat his question. Then she speaks with perhaps a shade of unwillingness :

“ Well, no ; I do not think I was. One gets used to things, you know, and he is not a bad boy, after all, and—and—and he was almost as useful as Frederic himself in running errands.”

“ And expected the same reward, I suppose ?” says Paul, with a sneer.

“ I have not a notion what he expected,” retorts Lenore, beginning to look rather rebellious, and to hum a tune.

“ Lenore ! Lenore !” (the sneer disappearing as he snatches her hands, and gazes with anxious grieved love into her

face), “ what were the *very last words* I said to you at St. Malo ?—do you remember ? ”

“ Pèrfectly ; they were, ‘ God bless you, darling ! ’ ” she answers, speaking softly, her lips framing the words lovingly, as if they were dear to them.

“ Ay, but the words just before them ? ”

“ They were ugly, stupid, unnecessary, jealous words ! I do not remember them,” says she, impatiently, snatching away her hands, and not perceiving that the first half of her sentence contradicts the last.

“ Ugly, stupid, and jealous they may have been,” says Paul, with forced calmness, “ as many of my words, I daresay, are ; but *were* they *unnecessary* ? ”

“ What were they ? ” (very impatiently). “ Let us hear them, and have done with them ! ”

“ They were, ‘ *Do not flirt with Scrope !* ’ ”

“ Well ? ”

“Whatever else you do, I know you do not tell lies : *did* you flirt with him ?”

“Upon my soul, I do not know !” answers Lenore, ingenuously.

“I would have given you *carte blanche* to bully Jemima and maltreat your nephews,” says Paul, magnanimously. “What do little flaws in the temper matter compared to——O Lenore, to lower yourself and me by flirting with *that boy*, my own friend, whom I myself had introduced to you, and after all I had said to you !——Why do not you turn your face this way ? Good God ! is it possible that you are *blushing* about him ?”

“I am blushing with *rage* at being put through such a degrading catechism !” answers Lenore, colouring scarlet, and flashing indignantly at her lover.

“*Did* you flirt with him ?” repeats Paul, sternly : his lips look thin and sulky, and his eyes also sparkle coldly.

“ Is sitting by the hour in a person’s company, wondering when he means to go, and yawning till the tears come into your eyes, flirting with him ?” asks the girl, excitedly—her mouth beginning to twitch, and the tears to gather in her eyes.

“ Certainly not.”

“ Is thinking a man very good-looking, and wishing that he would fall in love with your elder sister, and being sure that he will not, flirting with him ?”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Is going endless expeditions to places that you have not the heart to look at, in a man’s company, letting him spread his overcoat on the grass for you to sit upon, and carry your Prayer Book to church, and forgetting to say ‘ Thank you ’—flirting with him ?”

“ No—o !”

“ Is ” (this last query comes much less trippingly and more reluctantly from her

tongue than the former one)—“Is seeing that a man is going to make a fool of himself about you, and being so shamefully fond of admiration as not to do *everything* in your power to stop him—is *that* flirting with him?”

“Of course it is,” replies Paul, roughly, all his brown face turning white in his deep anger.

“Then I *did* flirt with him!” cries Lenore, bursting into a passion of penitent tears, and throwing herself into her lover’s arms, which neither expect nor are willing to receive her.

“You did—did you?” says Paul, cuttingly, not making any attempt to press her to his heart, or otherwise caress her, but, on the contrary, endeavouring to restore her to the perpendicular, which she has abandoned in his favour. “And you can stand there smiling, and tell me so?”

“Not much *smiling* about it, I think,”

replies the girl, ruefully, wiping her eyes ; then, more tartly : “ Why did you go on asking me, if you did not want to be answered ? O Paul !—Paul ! ” catching his hand and holding it, “ I am not much of a person ; long ago I told you that, and you would not believe me. Ah ! you see it now—but don’t—*don’t* be too hard upon me ! I have not been, like your sisters, pent all my life in a good, steady, stagnant English home, where never a man dare look over the park-palings. All my life I have been a Bohemian, as I told you almost the first time that we met—up and down the world, here, there, and everywhere, and I have always had some man dangling after me. I did not care for them, Heaven knows, and I daresay they did not care for me ; but they were useful, and pleasant, and made the time pass——”

“ As Scrope no doubt did ! I daresay ”
(looking very ugly and sardonic, for a sneer

deforms the beautifullest face, much more an unhandsome one,) "that you did not find the days between June and December so *endless* as you expected; perhaps you did not buy that *popgun*, after all?"

"No, I did not," says Lenore, her wrath bursting out into a blaze. "Paul, I warn you that you are going the very best way to hinder me from being sorry for what I did. What am I saying? What *did* I do? I cared too little about his comings and goings to shut the house-door in the face of a boy, who had got into a stupid habit of staring at me, and who—I own to you—would have loved me if I had let him, without my running after him, and persecuting him in the way I did you"—throwing herself into a rustic chair, and sobbing violently at the reopening of the old wound caused by the reluctant origin of Paul's affection.

Paul hates a scene with all his strength. He kneels down beside her, but even then

he is too angry to be able to bring himself to say anything fond. "Good God ! Lenore, stop crying ; they will hear you in the drawing-room."

"If I *had* turned him out of the house," she says, from the depths of her pocket-handkerchief, "I should have met him fifty times a day in the street."

"Why could not you leave Dinan ?"

"We had taken the lodgings for six months."

"*Lenore !*" (very impatiently), "what are you *going on* crying about ? What more have I said ? It is five minutes to luncheon-time."

"Hundreds and hundreds of times I have told him, honestly, what a bore I thought him !" continues she, drying her eyes, having successfully stained and disfigured her face almost past recognition.

"It implies a considerable amount of intimacy with a man to be able to tell him, to

his face, that you think him a bore," retorts Paul, drily.

"I *was* intimate with him," replies Lenore, boldly. "Who says I was not?—not I, certainly. He was kind and manly and gentlemanlike, which not one of the half-dozen broken-down Irishmen who form the manhood of Dinan was : he was a sort of tame cat about the house, and so near my own age, and altogether"—

Paul winces ; he himself was verging on eighteen, full of a man's impulses and thoughts, when this his betrothed was born.

"When I gave myself to you at Huelgoat," continues the girl, more calmly, but with profound earnestness in her swimming eyes, "and you took me—more, I think, out of compassion and gratitude than anything else, but still you took me—did I keep back one smallest fraction to be able to give it to another man ? Not a shred ! *Myself*, with all my badness and my good-

ness—not much of the latter, perhaps—I gave you, and you have it.”

“I have—have I?” says Paul, whose harsh face has been gradually softening throughout the last sentence, and at the end looks almost mollified. “Well, then, with your permission I will keep you, and not hand you over to Mr. Scrope, manly and gentlemanlike as he no doubt is, and also so much more suitable to you in age, as you kindly reminded me just now. Lenore, I have been counting; I was eighteen the day you were born.”

“And I am sure you were an ugly gawky hobbledohoy, all arms and legs! I am very glad I did not know you in those days,” says Lenore, laughing; then quite gravely: “Paul, never pretend to be jealous of me again! It is patent to everybody that I love you a hundred times better than you do me; you know it yourself, and I—I am not blind to it.”

"Bosh!" says Paul, turning away uneasily, not feeling exactly guilty; for he does love her heartily, yet with an uncomfortable lurking sensation that there is a grain of truth in what she asserts.

"It is the way of the world, I suppose," says the girl, sighing. "One gives, and the other takes; it would be superfluous for *both* to give, would not it? Perhaps some day—some far-off day—the balance will be changed, and we shall love each other equally; till then"——

"Till then," says Paul, gaily, mimicking her tone—"till then, Lenore, let us go to luncheon, and eat so many mince pies as to incapacitate us for afternoon church."





CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

IT is afternoon tea-time, and that high festival is always held in the hall. Scrope knows that there is no hope of *bézi*que to-night, and Paul sees that a *tête-à-tête* is unlikely. They have therefore retired to the smoking-room, and, with their enmity temporarily smothered, and their friendship as temporarily re-born, are smoking the pipe of peace together. Only the three sisters lounge round the fire in easy chairs; the fire, in burning, makes the low quiet noise that is fire's talk.

“How I ever shall bring myself to call him ‘Paul,’ I am sure I do not know,” says Sylvia, gently waving to and fro the hand-screen with which she is shading her face. “If it were a three, or even a two-syllabled name—Augustus, or Reginald, or Henry—it would not sound half so familiar; but ‘*Paul*!’ there is something so abrupt and uncompromising about it; however, I managed to bring it out at luncheon. I said ‘*Paul*, will you cut me some partridge?’ Did you hear? He looked so pleased.”

“I do not think he heard,” says Jemima, maliciously. “I always tell Lenore that he is like Dr. Johnson—*deaf* while he is eating.”

“Oh, but he did, though!” retorts Sylvia, quickly, getting rather pink. “I knew it by his face; one can always tell by a man’s face when he is rubbed the right way.”

Jemima looks across sceptically at Lenore, who smiles lazily back.

“ Do you remark that he never calls me anything but ‘ Mrs. Prodgers ? ’ ” continues Sylvia, complacently ; “ many a man would have taken advantage of his situation to ‘ Sylvia ’ me at once. I think it so particularly gentlemanlike of him, and I shall tell him so as soon as we get on a little more easy terms ; you might give him a hint, Lenore, that he need not be so ceremonious for the future.”

“ I do not think it has anything to say to gentlemanliness,” replies Jemima, who has retained all her old aversion for hearing Mr. Le Mesurier complimented. “ He does not remember your Christian name.”

“ Impossible ! ” cries Sylvia, now thoroughly nettled. “ How can he help knowing it when he hears Charlie Scrope calling me by it fifty times in the course of the day ? By-the-bye, I must tell that boy that

it will not do for him to be Christian-naming me before all those people at the Websters to-night. Poor fellow! he means no harm; but I suppose it is one of the penalties of being left so early alone in the world, that one sets people's tongues wagging more easily than others do."

"What a trial the Websters are!" says Jemima, groaning. "To dine out on Christmas Day! It would be a hardly greater heathenism to give a ball on Good Friday!"

"And such a regiment of us going too!" says Lenore, sitting up in her chair, and pushing back the restive hair-pins that her reclining attitude has displaced. "One, two, three, four, five—like a flock of ducks *waddling* into the room one after another."

"I do not see why we need *waddle*!" says Sylvia, with dignity.

"I do hate visiting in a patriarchal

manner, with ‘all my tribe!’ returns Lenore, energetically.

Her betrothed is quite of her mind; suavity of manner is never his *forte*; but he has difficulty in manifesting even his usual amount of complaisance, when he discovers what his fate is to be.

“Oh, Mrs. Prodgers, could not you leave Lenore and me at home? We should never be missed out of such a multitude,” he says, vainly hoping for a reprieve at the last moment. “There is something so appalling in being trotted out as two people who are going to commit matrimony; an engaged couple are always everybody’s legitimate butt.”

“I do not think you need be afraid of that,” says Sylvia, speaking with the happy mixture of sisterliness and coquetry with which she always addresses her future connection. “You see you have never been seen with us before, and Char——, I mean

Mr. Scrope, has always been *en évidence*. I think he is generally looked upon as the happy man. Lenore, would not Paul have laughed the other night to see the way in which the Ansons manœuvred to let you have the morning-room to yourselves? If they are there to-night, we may have quite a pleasant little mystification."

At the conclusion of this speech, Scrope smiles oddly, Jemima reddens, Lenore rushes headlong into a remark that has neither head, tail, nor middle, and Paul—Paul is putting on his overcoat; his face is turned away—one cannot see it.

* * * * *

They look to themselves—or rather to some of themselves—an inordinately long string, as they file into the Websters' drawing-room: three long-tailed ladies' two swallow-tailed men. The light is very subdued, even more so than people usually have it in the five minutes before dinner.

Paul gives up the idea of making out the Webster family in detail till dinner ; then Lenore will explain them to him sufficiently to prevent his descanting on the ugliness of a wife to a husband, or making disparaging remarks about a child to a parent. As he stands near the fire, *furnishing* the room, in company with half a dozen other men—whom he regards with the innate distrust and thinly-veiled suspicion with which every Englishman regards every other Englishman who has the misfortune to be unknown to him—his spirit soothes itself. The drive was the worst part, and *that* is over : not allowed to decline into comfortable silence and semi-sleep by Sylvia, next whom he sat, and obliged by the noise the omnibus made to say “ What ? ” and “ I beg your pardon, I did not catch what you said,” in answer to all her low-murmured prettinesses.

He will be very kind to Lenore to-night. Hitherto he has made her Christmas Day rather tearful, poor child ! Well, she shall have a thoroughly happy evening, if he can compass it ; after all, perhaps, he will have better chances of private commune with her, of sweet grave talk, and sweeter looks into her lovely loving eyes, than he would have had in the small home-party, with Jemima and Sylvia staring at him.

These thoughts are interrupted by the approach of an old lady in a yellow gown (to whom he has a dim idea of having been introduced as hostess), who leads him up to a plain girl in blue, presents him, and leaves him beside her, with a whispered request that he will take her in to dinner.

In a moment afterwards, that festival is announced. Paul sees men and women, all equally unknown to him, paired together, marching solemnly off. Presently a couple, of whom neither man nor woman

is unknown to him, sweep by—Lenore and Scrope.

“ This is part of the pleasant little mystification, I suppose,” he thinks, setting his teeth. “ Who knows if Lenore were not a party to it ? ” But the ungenerous thought is no sooner formed than he is disabused of it by the expression of the beautiful face, that, unhappily for itself, can never keep its own secrets. She looks at him over her shoulder with a look of unaffected angry disappointment, shrugs her shoulders almost imperceptibly, while her lips frame words which he rather *feels* than hears to be, “ Too bad ! ”

On the very smallest encouragement she would outrage propriety by dropping Scrope’s arm and running to him. Perhaps, after all, he may be able to sit on the other side of her. He catches up his ugly blue fate in a hurry, and hastens off with her in pursuit ; but it is too late—another

couple have struck in and occupied the coveted place ; he has to content himself with being nearly opposite.

There is a great deal of holly and mistletoe about the room. Most of the women have holly in their hair ; it does not look particularly pretty, and scratches their heads and necks. Altogether, there is a great affectation of Christmas cheer and jollity. But the *entrées* are cold, the champagne is all froth and sweetness, and the sherry is not to be named in the same breath with Mrs. Prodgers's.

Scrope has no idea of allowing his neighbour to lapse into sentimental silence and wistful gazes across the table. He has got her now to himself for a full hour and a half ; except under pretext of a bleeding nose, or improbably sudden indisposition, she cannot get away from him.

“ Miss Lenore, the expression of your face reminds me of a scene in ‘ The Tam-

ing of the Shrew:’ ‘Enter Horatio, with his head broken.’”

Lenore declines to smile.

“It is not my fault that Mrs. Webster has not entered with her head broken,” she answers, with perfect gravity.

“Why so?—for giving us such drink as this? Well, it *is* filthy stuff!”

“For making such a stupid mistake as to send me out to dinner with *you*.”

He bows his blonde curled head, ceremoniously. “Thanks.”

“Engaged people *always* go in to dinner together,” says Lenore, trenchantly.

“On what principle, I never could divine. With a whole lifetime to get sick of each other in, why they should be crammed down each other’s throats before there is any legal necessity, I never could see.”

“That is *their* affair.”

“Mrs. Webster was aware of the bar-

baric custom," says Scrope, growing as red as any girl. "She was good enough to imagine that it was *I* that was engaged to you."

Lenore reddens, and turns down the corners of her mouth.

"What could have put so *grotesque* an idea into her head?"

"There is nothing grotesque about it," replies the young man, coolly. "Internally, we may be conscious of how distasteful to, and dissimilar from, each other we are; but *outwardly*, we are rather suitable."

"I do not see it" (very icily).

"Miss Lenore" (turning round, and bending over her, to speak low and eagerly), "why do you thrust your happiness so obtrusively under my nose? Do I deny your bliss? Do I pretend to be as happy as you?" She is silent. "We cannot *all* be Paul Le Mesuriers, you know,"

says Scrope, with a rather jarring laugh. “ Of course, we would if we could ; but, as we cannot, you must bear with us.”

Lenore glances across apprehensively at her lover, to see whether he has caught his own name ; but no—he is not looking at her. With grave interest, he and his blue neighbour are together consulting the mystic French secrets of the *carte*. Bah ! how greedy the best of men are !

“ Was it good manners,” continues Scrope, growing more excited at each word, “ to shrug your shoulder so perceptibly, and exclaim so audibly, ‘ Too bad ! ’ because your hand had to rest on my coat-sleeve for the tenth part of a minute ? ”

“ I never pretend to good manners,” replies Lenore, shortly.

“ He will sit into your pocket all this evening ; he will sit into your pocket,” says the young man (making use of an audacious figure), “ all the rest of your life. Need

you have grudged me my miserable half-hour's innings ?”

Again Lenore glances hurriedly across ; still he is not thinking of her. She looks at Scrope : his blue eyes are always bright, but the champagne, bad as it is, has made them sparkle more brightly than ever. With his straight nose and soft gold moustache, most women would have thought him distractingly handsome. An innocent, cherubic, yet stalwart beauty, such as some men manage to preserve through half-a-dozen seasons, Scrope looks as if he had said his prayers and gone to bed at eight o'clock every night of his life.

“ For one half-hour forget that there is such a person,” says the young man, entreatingly. “ At cheese-time I will give you leave to remember him again.”

“ You are very good. Till then ”——

“ Till then—bah !” cries he, with a reckless laugh ; “ let us eat and drink, for to-

morrow we die, or — *marry*, which is worse.”

“ The one is at least optional, which the other is not,” says Lenore, with a demure but rather wicked look at him from under her eyes.

Paul has abandoned the *carte* ; he has discovered what the word that puzzled him was. “ It is ‘ *Topinenbourgs*,’ ” he says to his neighbour ; and then he leans wearily back, and thinks that he will refresh himself with a look at his beautiful sweetheart. He does so just in time to witness the glance that she is bestowing on his rival : it is the only look with the slightest tendency to coquetry in it that she has given him during dinner, and it is the only one that Paul intercepts. *Pouf !* is not that ill-luck for you ?



CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

THE men are left to themselves—
left to work their wicked will
upon the walnuts, and to raven
amongst the candied fruits, of whose existence, as long as the women were in the room, they pretended to be unaware. And the women, meanwhile, stand, gently rustling, softly chattering, about the drawing-room fire ; sipping coffee, holding gossamer handkerchiefs between their pretty pink faces and the flame, and mentally pricing and depreciating each other's gowns.

Sylvia is very happy : she has, indisputably, a longer tail and a thicker silk than any one else present ; her toilette happily hits the golden mean between the mournful and the magnificent, and she is almost sure that, as she left the dining-room, she heard some man ask who she was. Presently every one sinks into chairs, and upon ottomans and sofas ; breaking up into groups of twos and threes, as similarity of tastes in point-lace, dressmakers, and children prompts. Lenore forms part of no group —takes part in no chat. The night is cold, and the room not particularly well warmed ; yet she chooses an easy-chair apart from the rest of the company, and unsocially sitting by itself in a little recess. Lenore deposits herself upon it, and bides her time. When the walnuts, candied fruits, and ungodly after-dinner stories are done, that time comes.

Paul is determined not to be checkmated

a second time ; he may dislike to be pointed at as an engaged man, but he dislikes still more to have Mr. Scrope pointed at as such. He walks straight up to Lenore.

“Do you know what I have got hidden here?” asks the girl, looking up at him, while her whole face laughs — not only mouth, but eyes, dimples, cheeks—as she points to the wide spread of her gown. “Guess !”

“I have not an idea.”

She sweeps away her skirts, and discloses a tiny light cane-chair.

“Sit down ! You are an unfortunately big person, but I think, judiciously sat upon, it *may* bear you.”

He had meant to scold her : well, the scolding will keep ; it may be carried over, and added to the next account. He sits down, and his jealousy goes to sleep.

“I was determined to have no more *mal-entendus* to-night,” says the girl, gravely.

“ If any one had come this way, I meant to have looked at them with my own scowl—the one you used to admire so much—and say, ‘ This is Mr. Le Mesurier’s chair. ’ ”

“ Lenore ” (looking round with a sense of lazy wellbeing), “ is there *any one* in the room that is not a Webster ? ”

“ Hardly anybody ; they are all directs or collaterals. That tall old woman whose forehead has goodnatureedly gone round to look for the back of her head, who is *ambling* about saying indistinct civilities to everybody, is Mrs. Webster, the head and front of all the others ; she always reminds me of *Agag*—she ‘ goes so delicately. ’ ”

“ I know her, the old cat ! ” says Paul, resentfully. “ Serve her right if she were drowned in a butt of her own gooseberry, and I cannot wish her a worse fate. ”

“ The old young woman who never stops smiling is Miss Webster ; we call her ‘ the savoury omelette, ’ because she is

so green and yellow ! *Does not she* smile ? —it makes one's face ache to look at her." Paul laughs. " Paul, if you jilt me, and no one else takes compassion on me, do you think I shall ever get to the pitch of smiling like that ? If I thought so, I would have the corners of my mouth sewn up."

" Prevention is better than cure : I would."

" The man with the red beard is Major Webster : do you see how short and broad he is ? His brother officers say that he has *swallowed a box* : is not it a delicious idea ?—it quite invigorates me."

Paul laughs again : after dinner, it is pleasanter to be amused than to be amusing.

" Apropos of beards," says Lenore, turning from the company to a subject that interests her more, " yours has not disappeared yet, Paul ?"

“ Why, did you think it would ? Did you suppose I *moulted*, like the birds ? ”

“ I thought, perhaps, you might have *moulted voluntarily*, to please me,” replies she, with a slight pout.

“ When my beard moults,” retorts he gaily, with an expressive glance at the sleek but unnaturally luxuriant twists that bind her head, “ I shall expect your (or rather the *unknown dead person’s*) plaits to moult too.”

Lenore shrugs. “ *Que voulez vous ?* Look at Sylvia. She has at least five pounds’ worth on her head ; I have certainly not more than £2 10s. on mine. Nowadays, without a chignon of some sort, one’s head looks mutilated and indecent.”

“ Then I like mutilation and indecency.”

“ Do you know, Paul ” (with a pretty air

of candour), "without my plaits I hardly look handsome at all?"

"I do not believe it," replies Paul, with warmth; "I would stake my existence that you look infinitely handsomer, sweeter, modester! Why cannot you be content to wear your hair as Nature meant it—*flat* to your head, and *low down* on your ears and cheeks?"

"Merciful Heavens!" cries Lenore, expressively casting up hands and eyes to heaven. "Paul!" (with a sudden suspicion), "have you been seeing any one lately with her hair dressed like that?"

To her searching eyes, he seems to reddened ever so slightly.

"No—o, nobody particular."

She is not satisfied, but does not pursue the subject.

"Well" (with a sigh) "to return to your beard——Bah! what does the old woman want with us now? Apropos of

beards, look at hers ! Has not she a ‘ *menton d’une fertilité désolante*,’ as Gustave Droz says ?”

“ So sorry to disturb you, but we are going to play Dumb Scrambo.”

This is Mrs. Webster’s errand.

“ And what *is* Dumb Scrambo ?” asks Paul, with a disgusted intonation, when, hunted out of their cold and quiet alcove, and the hostess having moved on to collect fresh recruits, he and Lenore advance to join the rest of the company.

“ It is not bad fun,” answers the girl—
“ a sort of silent charade, you know : did you never see it ? Oh, you *must* have done !”

“ But I have not.”

“ Oh, you know, the audience think of a word. You will be audience, will not you ? I am sure that you can no more act than a tom-cat.”

“ Well ?”

“ And then, do not you know—they give the actors another word that rhymes with it ; and then they—the actors, I mean—have to act in dumb-show all the other words that rhyme with it, till they hit upon the right one.”

At this lucid explanation, given with surprising rapidity, Paul looks a good deal mystified. Mrs. Webster has some difficulty in collecting a troupe. Sylvia is among those who positively decline.

“ Oh no, indeed—thanks, Mrs. Webster—I really could not : I am so childishly nervous that the feeling that everybody’s eyes were fixed upon me would make every word I had to say go out of my head.”

“ But you have *no* words to say ; it is all *dumb-show*.”

“ Oh, thanks ! but that really would not make any difference ; I should have the

same dreadful feeling that everybody was looking at me.” .

It being useless to try and convince her that some of the other actors might divert a portion of the dreaded public notice from her, Mrs. Webster desists.

Paul declines too, with that decisive brevity which forbids pressing. He is angry with Lenore for not having done likewise ; but she is firm.

“ Impossible, my dear boy,” she says, in a smiling aside. “ If they were to ask me to walk on my head to-night, I should have to try and do it. Have not they given us a huge family teapot, and is not this part-payment ? ”

He is the more displeased when he sees Mr. Scrope march off, with the rest of the performers, into the dining-room, which opens out of the hall, and is converted into a temporary green-room.

It is a pretty old house, oak-floored ; a

step here, a step there, in and out of the rooms. The audience have disposed themselves about the hall-fire, in chairs set a-row for them. The leading spirits amongst them have fixed upon a word, a very little one indeed, but which they hope will prove puzzling : it is *jet*. The word that rhymes with it, which they have given to the performers, is *net*. In the interval of waiting, until these latter shall be prepared to be dumbly funny, they beguile the time with talk.

“ I always envy people who have *aplomb* enough to act, and do all those sort of things that make one conspicuous,” says Sylvia, leaning back in her chair, biting the top of her black fan, and looking pensively over it at Paul, who happens to be her neighbour. “ I am afraid I am not *quite like other people*, but I should feel ready to *sink into the earth*, don’t you know. Now, Lenore has none of that feeling.”

“ Evidently not,” replies Paul, drily.

His eyes are fixed on the dining-room door : it is a little ajar, and, through the chink left, he sees a dim vision of green. Lenore has a green dress ; he is straining his eyes to see whose are the legs that are in juxtaposition with that green gown.

“ Last time we were here,” continues Sylvia, “ they acted the word ‘ tail ; ’ and all the ladies fastened long boas to their dresses behind, and walked about the stage wagging them. ’ You can have no conception how droll it looked.”

Further talk is stopped by the opening of the dining-room door, and appearance of the performers. Mr. Scrope makes his entry on his hands and knees, crawling awkwardly along. It is plain that he is meant to represent a horse ; his gait much more nearly resembles a cross between that of a bear and a monkey, but the equine *intention* is evident ; it is rendered

the more so by the fact of Major Webster being seated astride on his back, with a tall hat on his head, and a dog-whip in his hand : with this latter he pleasantly flogs him round the stage. Then another Webster enters—a heavy fellow, who has been distinguishing himself by making stupid and impossible suggestions—comes up, and *feels his legs*. Mr. Scrope lashes smartly out at him, and then continues his victorious course, kicking and plunging round the room. It entails fearful exertion, and feelings verging on apoplexy ; but he is rewarded by the plaudits of his fellows. Having unhorsed Major Webster, and sent that gallant officer rolling on the oak-floor, to the great benefit of his dress-clothes, the cortège retires, amid laughter and well-deserved hisses.

“How good for the knees of his trousers!” says Paul, who, with a mind relieved from the apprehension of seeing

Lenore in some grotesquely affectionate, or affectionately grotesque, attitude with Scrope, is able to laugh as heartily as the others.

“ Poor man ! did not he look as if all the blood in his body had rushed to his head ?” says a young lady, compassionately.

“ That was a good *bonâ fide* kick he gave Webster,” says a man—“ no mistake about it. I wonder how his shins feel !”

Meanwhile, the actors are talking over their late performance, and planning the next.

“ It was not obvious enough,” says Major Webster, who, being manager, is responsible for the *éclat* of the proceeding.

“ It had no more to say to *bet* than I have,” said Lenore, bluntly. “ I cannot imagine how they ever guessed it ; I do not believe they have.”

“ Well—no, perhaps not !” (looking rather mortified). “ You see ” (gnawing

his moustache, reflectively), "we were supposed to be *betting* about *him*" (nodding at Scrope). "It is rather difficult to be explicit when one does not say anything."

"Phew!" cries Scrope, wiping his face, and stroking down his tossed curly locks. "I had no idea that being a horse was such apoplectic work. Miss Lenore" (turning eagerly to her), "did you see me? Was not I a very free goer?"

"I did not look at you," replies Lenore, indifferently. "I was thinking what we could have next. What on earth rhymes with net?—Set? pet? fret?"

"Fret!" cries Paul's blue dinner neighbour, determined not to be behind the rest, though in her the dramatic gift is, to say the least, latent. "Might not we all go in, and sit in a row with our handkerchiefs up to our eyes, crying, don't you know?"

“I do not think it would be very amusing,” replies Lenore, drily. “Let? set? pet?”

“*Pet!*” suggests the heavy youth, brilliantly. “What do you say to one of us going in by himself, and pretending to be in an ill-humour—pet—eh?”

This idea meets with the silent contempt it so justly merits.

A pause.

“Stay—I have it,” says Scrope, eagerly. “Eureka! One of us must be a *baby*—a dear little *pet*, you know; and some one else must carry us in, squalling and holloaing. I say, who will be the baby? Do not all speak at once!”

The warning is unnecessary.

“Well, I suppose, if nobody else will, *I* must,” says Major Webster, rather ruefully.—“Scrope, you are the biggest; will *you* carry me in? *Are you sure you can?*” eyeing him rather doubtfully.

"Of course I can, my dear fellow, as soon as look at you; up with you!" answers Scrope, stoutly, and so stoops promptly down to embrace his nursling's legs.

"Stop a bit!" cries the other, gravely, stroking his red beard. "I must have something on, must not I; or they will not know I *am* a baby?"

Scrope looks round on the properties scattered about — umbrellas, hats, door-mats, sheets, carving-knives.

"Here you are," he says, snatching up a white tablecloth. "This is the very thing for you. Who has got a big pin?"

Having pinned the tablecloth round his waist, and tied an antimacassar over his head, Major Webster stands complete, ready to represent smiling infancy. There is some difficulty in getting him hoisted up; the tablecloth *will* get under Mr. Scrope's feet, and trip him up.

“For God’s sake, don’t drop me,” cries Webster, nervously. “Perhaps we had better give up the idea !”

“Not a bit of it ! Get up on the chair ; I shall have better *purchase* of you.”

“And what am I to do ?” asks Lenore, beginning to laugh by anticipation. “Have *I no rôle ?*”

“Oh, you must be nurserymaid, don’t you know ?” says Scrope, panting, and clasping the Major’s legs as he stands on the chair ; “and give him the bottle when he holloas. There, take that hearth-brush, and shoot it out at him ; that will do as well as anything else.”

“But a bottle does not *shoot out*,” objects Lenore, whose acquaintance with the ways and appurtenances of infancy, though meagre, is apparently more exact than the young man’s.

“What does that signify ?” says Scrope, breathlessly, having with one final effort

heaved up his bearded baby. "One must leave *something* to the imagination."

"For God's sake, mind the step!" cries Webster, gloomily, looking down with apprehensive eye from his unnatural elevation.

It *is* nervous work, but they get through it triumphantly. Mr. Scrope staggers along, with labouring breath, and arms firmly clasped round his baby's tableclothed legs; who, for his part, clutching Scrope convulsively round the neck, while his bronzed face and beard emerge absurdly from his antimacassar, gives utterance to a series of the dismallest deep *yells*, supposed to represent the faint cries of infancy. Lenore walks gravely alongside, occasionally shooting out her hearth-brush at him: whether or not the audience discover that it is the mystic symbol of an 'Alexandra' bottle will never be known till the Last Day. Having completed the circuit

of the room, and made a playful feint of depositing his “ *pet* ” in Jemima’s lap, Mr. Scrope and his coadjutors retire.

“ I thought it was *Dumb Scrambo*,” says Paul, drily, as Major Webster’s last *bellow* dies on the ear.

“ I suppose that only applies to articulate sounds,” replies Jemima, who is on his other side. “ Bah ! ” (wiping her eyes) ; “ it is an insult to one’s understanding to laugh, but one cannot help it. After all, it is not half so good as charades.”

“ Paul should have been at the Ansons’ the other night,” says Sylvia, with a little coy hesitation and stumbling (both quite thrown away) over his name ; then, turning to him :

“ You should have seen Lenore, as *bar-maid*, running about and saying all sorts of impertinent things to the gentlemen, in a Breton cap. Do you know, she has got an *immensely* becoming Breton cap ! I tell

her that it is too matronly for her, and that she ought to give it to me. Do you give your consent?" (opening and shutting her fan bashfully).

"A *barmaid*!" repeats Paul, with a slightly clouded face. "Very entertaining, I daresay; and who *were* the gentlemen that she said impertinent things to?"

"You need not be jealous," interposes Jemima, with a rather dry laugh. "Only old Mr. Anson; he came in as *Boots* in a pea-jacket. Now, if there is an absurd sight in the world, it is an old fat man in a pea-coat."

"Ah! true, so it was!" says Sylvia, languidly. "*Inconstant*, you know, was the word; that was *inn*, and *constant*"——

"How long they are in coming this time!" cries Jemima, hastily interrupting. "What *can* they be doing?"

"And *constant*?" says Paul, leaning forward, while his eyes shine with a rather

doubtful expression. “ How was *that* acted ? ”

“ I don’t think I will tell you,” says Sylvia, with charming archness. “ You know, ‘ when the cat’s away the mice will play.’ Well, Lenore was supposed to be engaged to Charlie Scrope. Poor Charlie ! he tormented me out of my life to act too, but I said, ‘ No ! no ! no ! not my line at all ! ’ ”

“ Well—but about Lenore ? ” interrupts Paul, impatiently.

“ Oh yes, to be sure. Charlie was supposed to have been away for five or six years, and to come back suddenly, and then they rushed into each other’s arms ; of course ” (tapping him playfully with her fan), “ it was only a *stage-embrace*—*cela va sans dire*—but it made us all laugh ! ”

The cloud deepens on the young man’s forehead. “ It must have been almost

better than the barmaid," he says, grimly, turning away.

Meanwhile, the ingenious troupe, still at fault for the right word, have hit upon another wrong one—" *Wet.*"

" *You* carry in a candle," says Major Webster to Lenore, thrusting the weapon indicated into her hand, "and pretend to catch fire; blow out the candle and drop it, and begin to scream like mad; and then, don't you know, we will all rush in with buckets, and put you out."

"But must I scream much—or little?"

"Oh, the louder the better; and you must go on screaming till we come."

Lenore does exactly as she is bid. Shrieking at the pitch of her high clear voice, imaginarily burning, and as imaginarily being extinguished—with one of Mrs. Webster's best silver candlesticks lying dented and doubled up at her feet, her joyous eyes seek her lover's face for ap-

plause ; but as soon as they light on it, both her laughter and her screams together die. Unmindful of her assistants, she hurries back into the dining-room.

“ You stopped *much* too soon,” says Major Webster, reproachfully ; “ you ought to have gone on for a quarter of an hour longer.”

“ Is your dress damaged ? Did any of the wax fall on it ? ” asks Scrope, eagerly, falling on his knees before her, and catching hold of the silk. His back is turned to the others, who have already fallen into fresh wranglings and janglings ; nobody sees him ; he stoops his head hurriedly, and brushes one of her smart lace-flounces with the silky gold of his moustache.

“ What are you doing ? ” she cries, angrily, twitching it away from his clasp.

“ I am playing a Dumb Scrambo of my own,” he says, lifting his eyes with a defiant

flash to hers. "Why do you stop me? It amuses me, and it does you no harm."

"I hate Dumb Scrambo!" she cries, passionately. "It is a vile game; why did you play at it?—who wanted you? There were plenty without you."

"I played," says the young man, raising himself from his kneeling posture, and growing rather white under these amenities, "because I have a benighted idea that when you go to other people's houses you should conform to *their* amusements, and not consult *only* your own, as some people do."

"Is that meant for a sneer at Paul?" asks Lenore, in a fury.

"Do you think," continues the young man, incisively, "that I *enjoyed* crawling along a beeswaxed floor in my dress-clothes?"

No answer.

“ Do you think that I *enjoyed* hauling about that Jack Pudding ” (with a glance at Major Webster’s broad back) “ for the amusement of half-a-dozen old women ? ”

“ Of course you did, or you would not have done it,” answers Lenore, brusquely.

“ It, at least, had the good effect of rooting you out of your corner,” says Scrope, with a bitter laugh. “ Perhaps it *was* worth while breaking one’s back, and spoiling the knees of one’s trousers, to accomplish such a result.”

“ Why on earth could not you leave us there in peace ? ” cries the girl, angrily. “ *You* might have sat in a corner till the crack of doom, and I would not have put out a finger to move you.”

“ You are *in disgrace*,” says the young man, speaking in a low voice, but with an eager flush ; “ I know it—so do you ! we saw it in his face—in *disgrace*, because I poured an imaginary bucket of imaginary

water over you ! Such being the case, I wish you *joy* of your future life !”

* * * * *

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

We are in the omnibus, going home. There is not an earthly vehicle that makes a more deaving din than an omnibus—a sort of steam threshing-machine in one’s head ; yet we are all talking—at least not all—four of us—*à qui mieux mieux*.

“ Very stingy with their champagne ; did not half fill one’s glass.”

“ Very bad oyster-sauce !—something oily about it !”

“ The fricandeau was good ; I am always fond of a fricandeau.”

“ I think that, considering they have a three hundred guinea *chef*, and three in the kitchen beside, they *might* give one better bread-sauce.”

“ I am sure Major Webster has got a temper ! I saw him scowling at one of the footmen at dinner.”

These are some of the severe and spirited strictures that we are passing on the entertainment we have just quitted.

“ I almost wish that we had asked Mrs. Webster to wait for us in the cloak-room, at the ball on Friday night, so that we might all go into the room together,” says Sylvia, with what I *feel*, though I cannot *see*, to be a simper. “ Of course I am *really* quite an efficient chaperone, but people make such stupid mistakes ! The man who took me into dinner asked Miss Webster whether I was *out* ! Just fancy ! ”

“ How differently people see things ! ” I say, with my usual malevolence. “ The man who took *me* into dinner asked me which was the elder, you or I ? ”

Meanwhile Lenore says little, and Paul

nothing, though they are sitting side by side. As we clatter and rumble with redoubled noise through a village, a light from a window darts a ray into our darkness. I see that Lenore's face is turned towards him, and that the hand nearest him lies ungloved on her knee, as if wishing to be clasped by his. Under cover of the others' chatter, I listen treacherously to their whispered talk :—

“ Paul, are you *dead* ?”

“ No.”

“ Are you asleep ? I cannot see your eyes.”

“ No.”

“ Are you angry ?”

“ Yes.”

“ What about ?”

No answer.

“ Would you be less angry if I told you (stoop down your head) that I have been in Gehénnà all the evening, and

that I think *him* a greater bore than ever ?”

The next lamp-post that we pass reveals the white hand nestling in its owner's.





CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

“**I**F there is a thing in all this wide world that gives me the horrors,” says Sylvia, with a little shudder, “it is mutton dressed lamb fashion. I know my temptation lies in quite the other direction, to make a *grandmother* of myself!”

This is at luncheon, on the day succeeding the Dumb Scrambo ; the friendly criticisms on the entertainment and the entertainers are being renewed and carried on with a spirit hardly less piquant than the

sorrel sauce that is flavouring the interlocutors' cutlets.

“ Poor Harriet Webster ! a white book-muslin *frock*—one can call it nothing else—and a pink sash, *low*, too, nowadays, when no one thinks of being *décolleté* except at a ball ! ”

“ She only wanted a *rattle*, and to have her sleeves tied up with coral, to be the complete infant,” says Lenore, laughing maliciously. “ If she had thought of it, Mr. Scrope, you might have carried *her* in last night instead of her brother ; she would have been several stone lighter.”

“ And the way she kept hoisting up those wretched little shoulders, too, to her ears,” says Jemima, putting in her oar. “ I really *trembled* for the string of her tucker. I wonder her brother does not remonstrate.”

“ Pooh ! ” cries Lenore, carelessly, “ I do not suppose that he knows whether she *has* any shoulders or any tucker either—bro-

thers never do!" A little pause while the first sharpness of hunger is appeased; then Lenore recommences: "What bushy black brows *your* lady had, Paul. Poor fellow! I *did* pity you; and they met so amicably in a tuft on the top of her Roman nose."

"I did not think much of Miss Jemima's friend," says Scrope, laughing; "he looked as if he had been run up by contract—hands like feet, and feet like fire-shovels."

"And his wife?" says Jemima; "did you see her? No?—a little bunchy thing, who never says anything but 'Fancy!' and if you are *very* intimate with her, 'Just fancy!'"

"Men like her, I cannot imagine why," says Sylvia, languidly, "she has a way of *looking down her nose*."

"Paul, why don't you speak?" cries Lenore, with a pout; "we have all said something clever; it is quite your turn!"

"Is it?" says Paul, lazily. "Mine is a long time hatching; it will come presently;"

but, you see, you do not know any of my best friends: so it will lose all its point, I am afraid.”

“I am sure we have not said anything that was not perfectly goodnatured,” says Sylvia, with an air of injured innocence; “and as to that, I have no doubt we are quite quits; I daresay they have made quite as many comments on us—not that they *can* say *we* are *décolleté*—as we have on them.”

A diversion is here effected by the depravity of Tommy, who, being dissatisfied with his dinner, insists on saying, “Thank God for my nasty pudding!” instead of the authorized form of thanksgiving. He is instantly degraded from his high chair, and borne off wriggling like an eel, and kicking the footman’s shins.

“Let us go out,” says Lenore, laying her hand on her lover’s coat sleeves, as she passes out of the dining-room. “Let us

go into the wood ! I love a wood in winter. I *love* kicking the dead leaves ! If you are good you shall kick them too !” Five minutes later she has joined him as he stands in the wintry garden puffing at his pipe. “Wait a minute !” she cries, her eyes flashing gleefully ; “look at the children going out walking ; did you ever see any thing so be-comfortered and be-gartered ? I *must* run and knock their hats over their eyes !” She springs away from his side, and in two seconds is back again. “It is such fun !” she says, breathlessly ; “it makes them hate one so !”

And now they are in the wood ; above them the high brown boughs meet in wintry wedlock ; each little fine twig, no longer hid by leafage, asserts itself, standing delicately out against the softly-travelling, sad-coloured clouds beyond. Underneath all the trees’ dead children lie heaped ; there is no wind to stir them. There they lie ! one can hardly

tell one from another now—the horse-chestnut’s broad fan from the beech’s pointed oval—massed together in one bronze-coloured death. They are over Lenore’s ankles as, with all the delight of a child, she ploughs through them, kicking them up, laughing, and insisting that her lover shall kick them too.

“ What a good smell they have when one stirs them up,” she cries, “ something half-pungent ! Smell, Paul, smell ! ” Paul obeys, and stands docilely inhaling the autumnal odour. “ And now,” she says, clasping her two hands round his arm, leaning a very considerable weight upon him as they again pace slowly onwards, “ talk a great deal. I seem hardly to have heard your *real* voice yet ; yesterday was all church and plum-pudding and scolding, and to-day we have done nothing but dissect the Websters ; talk ! talk ! talk ! ”

“ How *can* I talk ? ” he says, laughing ;

“you will not let me get a word in edgewise.”

“Tell me all about everything,” she says, comprehensively. “Begin at the beginning, like a story—at the very moment you stepped off the Dinan boat—letters go for nothing. Were you very sea-sick? I believe you were, though you would not own it.”

“Frightfully, since you insist upon it,” replies Le Mesurier, with a mendacious smile. “I lay on deck on the small of my back, with a livid face, praying for shipwreck—that is the right feeling, is not it?—while, to add to my sufferings, everybody kept stumbling over my legs.”

“And when you got home,” continues the girl, eagerly, taking this statement for what it is worth, “were they all very glad to see you? Did they all rush out to the door to meet you?”

“The butler came out, I believe; I do

not think that even he *ran*; certainly no one else did.”

“And when they saw you” (speaking very rapidly), “how did they look? Did they look *odd*? What did they say to you?”

“Oh, I don’t know; much the same as they always say—nothing different—why should they? they did not know anything *then*; they said, ‘Oh, here you are!’ or something equally brilliant; and my father said, ‘For God’s sake, do not touch me! I have got it in both hands.’ He meant the gout.”

“And then you kissed them all,” says Lenore, a little envious at this part of the programme. “Do you kiss your father? Some grown-up men do.”

“Do they?” replies Paul, grimly. “How very unpleasant for both parties! No; *I* do not, certainly.”

“And—and was there no one there be-

sides just your own people—just your father and sisters ?” asks Lenore, with wily suavity.

“ My cousin, of course ?” (with a tone of airy nonchalance).

“ And ” (laughing not quite so easily as before)—“ and what was *she* doing ?”

“ My dear soul ” (with slight symptoms of impatience), “ it is six months ago ; how the mischief can I remember ?”—then, seeing her countenance fall a little—“ stitching, I fancy ; making a flannel petticoat for some old woman.”

“ Which she ostentatiously thrust into a cupboard the moment you appeared,” says Lenore, sarcastically, turning down the little red corners of her mouth—

“ ‘ Did good by stealth, and blushed to find it fame.’ ”

Paul lets this thrust pass in silence.

“ And did you bring me on the *tapis* that

night, or did you keep me till next morning?" (looking anxiously up in his face).

"I kept you for several days," he answers, smiling—"very much against my will, I can tell you; but I knew that as long as IT remained in his hands, there was no use broaching the subject."

"But the girls had not the gout!—you told them, did not you?" (with great animation).

Paul looks down, and his expression is embarrassed.

"Yes," he says, slowly, "I did."

"And showed them my photograph?"

"Ye—es."

"I hope you told them that my hair was not so dark as it looks there" (very anxiously). "Did not they think it pretty? Did not they say what a good figure I must have?"

"I daresay they would not have thought it polite to make personal remarks about

you to me," Paul answers, looking thoroughly confused; "and they never *are* girls to say civil things, don't you know?"

Lenore puts up one dog-skin gloved hand and hides her mouth: it is the mouth that, in its altered and quivering lines, betrays mortification most.

"Did not they—did not they say *anything*?" she asks, in a blank voice.

"They looked at the name of the photographer on the back," he answers, with a smile of recollected annoyance, "and said, 'Oh, yes; he was a good man, they knew.' I remember *that*, because it made me so savage!"

"And—and your *cousin*?—what did *she* say?"

"She was not there."

"But—but when you told her you were going to be married—what did she say *then*?"

"Pshaw!" cries he, impatiently, reddened—

ing slightly. "What extraordinary questions you do ask! What can it matter to you or me either what she said? She said the—the—usual thing, I suppose" (turning his head half away, and viciously knocking a big fungus-head off with his stick).

"I do not believe a word of it," cries Lenore, in a fury. "Why do you hate talking about her? Why do you always slide away from the subject when I lead to it? You do not *look* as if you were telling truth? I believe she—she—she—wanted to marry you herself."

Sometimes the innocent wear the pale livery of guilt, by some ingenious freak of nature. At this audacious statement Paul certainly looks whiter than his wont. "You are talking nonsense," he says, brusquely; "childish, unladylike nonsense," and so speaking, he drops her arm, and stalks on by himself.

She rustles after him through the dead

leaves, half-penitent, half-suspicious, till they reach a stile that gives egress from the wood into a meadow—a December meadow—a very different matter from one of June's buttercup gardens—a meadow flowerless, grey-coloured, and drenched. There, having overtaken him, she lays a hand on each of his arms. "Why *will* you insist on rousing my devil?" she says, impulsively. "Do you do it on purpose? I do not know whether other women have a devil, but I have, I know."

"It is so remarkably easily roused," he answers, drily.

"There is not a *gooder* woman in the world than I am sometimes," she continues, naïvely. "Why will not you let me always be?"

"*Let* you," he repeats, laughing, a little ironically, but looking down with a mollified expression at her repentant fond face, freshened by the cool moist wind.

"I am sure I do not know what I do to hinder you ; I wish to heaven you would be !"





CHAPTER VI.

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

THAT evening fate, in the shape of a sleek little widow, wills that we shall have a small dinner-party. We should all have much preferred to have kept to our family circle, and, lounging in our chairs, have wooed little contraband sleeps, in recollection of our last night's fatigues, and preparation for those of the next. But Sylvia is obdurate.

"Say what you please," she says, pronouncing each word very distinctly. "Call me a prude if you like—it will not be the

first time—I cannot help it, but it does feel so *odd*, we three quite young women sitting down and hobnobbing with those two young men ; nobody *belonging* to anybody else, don't you know."

"I beg to say I *do* belong to somebody," interrupts Lenore, holding up her head.

"I am sure nobody can feel more kind and sisterly than I do to Paul," continues Sylvia, with an air of conscious modest merit ; "but still there is no use denying that he is a comparative stranger, and I confess I *should* like him to see that we have *some* idea of civilisation."

So to prove our civilisation, we enlarge our little circle by the addition of the three Websters, of a couple of stray marauding girls, and of three diffident foot-soldiers from the —— Barracks.

"We used to have really *nice* regiments always," Sylvia says, in apology for these poor young gentlemen, before their arrival,

as she stands with one round white elbow leant on the mantel-piece, looking up with her large appealing eyes to Paul—Sylvia's eyes have appealed and besought and implored all their life, but what for, nobody ever could make out—"really *nice* regiments—the Inniskillings, and the 9th Lancers, don't you know; but now we have only those nasty walking things."

Paul laughs: "I like nasty walking things; I was one myself."

There are no mistakes as to pairing to-day. I, who have no claim upon anybody—I, to whom it is absolutely indifferent *who* leads me, so that I ultimately reach the savoury haven of dinner, and Mr. Scrope, who also has no right to anybody present, march in together. During soup, he tries to make feverish and unnatural love to me, which I rightly attribute to the fact of Lenore's blue ribbons and sweet peas being fluttering and flowering oppo-

site ; but as I indignantly decline to be the victim of any such imposture, he relapses into a sulky silence, and I into my usual trite vein of moralizing.

If people could but hear the comments made on them. For instance, if Miss Webster had but lurked behind the window-curtains at luncheon to-day, how clothed and lowered and quiet would her shoulders be. I look : they are still playfully shrugged and lifted in all their lean and virgin nakedness.

It is evening. Tea has re-united those whom claret parted. The footmen have wheeled in the card-table, and are now clearing another table for a round game—that noisy refuge of those who cannot talk—whereat loud and inarticulate sounds, like to the bray of the ass, the shrill clucking and calling of a distracted hen-roost, take the place of low-voiced and rational conversation. We are all making our

selection between the two games : there are far more candidates for the boisterous mirth of the one than for the silent dignity of the other. The infantry, and their attendant houris, the Websters, in short all the *externes*, distinctly decline a rubber.

Major Webster has arrived at the age when a man insists on being classed among "the young people." Being ten years his sister's senior, he is almost as old for a man as she for a woman. He likes to get near the youngest girl in the company—he *loves* bread and butter, that surest sign of advancing age—to bank with her, look over her cards, and tell her all about himself. Paul chooses whist : I am amused to hear Lenore (the amount of whose knowledge of the game I am acquainted with) follow suit. Mr. Scrope does the same ; so does Sylvia. As for me, I am nobody. I have been a spectator all my life. I am a spectator still. Lenore has walked over

to a cabinet, close to where I am sitting, to look for some whist-markers. Scrope has followed her on the same pretence.

"Why do not you join the round game?" I hear her ask him, hurriedly, in a low voice. "I wish you would—three-lived commerce and a pony—just the game for a nice little schoolboy."

"Just" (flushing a little and looking rather mulish).

"*Do!* there's a good boy! she says, almost imploringly, "I'm really in earnest."

"I will play *béziq*ue, if you like," he says, eagerly; "let me get the little round table; you shall deal every time."

She does not speak in answer, but only turns down the corners of her mouth, with an expression of the completest scorn.

"What are you two whispering about over there?" cries Sylvia, playfully, from the table; "no whispering allowed!"

“Let us cut for partners,” says Scrope, eagerly advancing.

“It is not much use,” replies Lenore, bluntly; “for whoever I cut with, I mean to play with Paul.”

They begin. It is Sylvia’s deal—Lenore to lead. It is some time before she realises this fact.

“Oh! is it *me*? What a bore! What on earth shall I play? I have no more idea——Paul, I wish you would suggest something?”

Paul looks resolutely, gravely impenetrable.

“When in doubt, play trumps!” suggests Scrope, laughing.

“*Trumps!*” (with an expression of profound contempt). “Very likely!—as if I did not know that one ought always to keep them to the *very* end.”

Having half-played several cards, and withdrawn them—having gazed imploringly

at Paul, who ill-naturedly will not lift his eyes—having tried to look over Scrope's hand, she at length embarks on the ace of diamonds. The others play little ones to it, and the trick is hers.

"Oh! it is mine again, is it?" (with a tone of annoyance). "If I had thought of that, I would not have played it. Now it is all to come over again. I suppose" (looking vaguely round for counsel) "that it is not a bad plan to play all one's big ones out first, is it?"

Paul conscientiously tries to veil the expression of extreme dissent that this proposition calls into his countenance, and so successfully, that the ace of hearts instantly and confidently follows his brother. He is succeeded by the ace of spades.

"You have every ace in the pack," Sylvia says, pettishly.

"*That* I have not!" answers Lenore, glancing up with a mischievous gaiety at

Scrope. “*You* know better than that, do not you, Charlie?”

At the unnecessary and illegal candour displayed by the first half of the sentence, Paul shudders slightly ; but at the familiar abbreviation of his friend’s name he forgets all about his cards. He would not look at his betrothed before, when she sought mute counsel from him. He looks at her quickly enough now, with an expression of the most unfeigned, displeased surprise. But, unluckily, she does not see it. Her gaze has strayed to the other table, and she is whispering to Scrope.

“Look at the Major—we always call him ‘*The Major*,’ as if there was only one in the world. He is telling that little Miss beside him how a cricket-ball once hit him in the left eye, and asking her to look in and see the mark.”

“How on earth can you tell at this distance?” asks Scrope, eagerly, answering in

the same tone, and playing at haphazard the first card that comes.

"I know his little ways," she says, laughing. "Once *I* used to be invited to look into his eye. Ah ! '*Nous avons changé tout cela.*' I am too old now."

"Would you mind going on, when you are quite ready ?" Paul asks, with an extreme politeness of tone a little contradicted by the unamiable expression of his countenance. Let those who blame him recollect that he loved strict whist, and the rules of the game, with a love hardly inferior to that of the renowned Mrs. Battle.

"*My* turn !" cries Lenore, returning to the consideration of her cards. "You do not say so ! It is *always* my turn. Now what next ? Have spades ever been out before ? Surely not."

She herself, as I have before observed, led the ace three minutes ago, and Sylvia threw away her queen on it. She now

boldly advances her king, which is naturally trumped. At this catastrophe she expresses the extremest surprise, which she calls upon Paul to share. In another quarter of an hour, not only the game, but the rubber is ended.

“Absolutely *thrown away*!” cries Paul, tossing down his last card, with a gesture of unrestrained irritation. “Two by honours, and excellent playing cards! It is enough to make a saint swear!”

“I do not know what you mean?” cried Lenore, reddening. “I am sure I did nothing wrong, did I?” (appealing to her adversaries). “I did not revoke, and I returned his lead whenever I remembered what it was, and I led out all my big things. One cannot expect to do much with those little nasty twos and threes!”

“Let us change partners,” cries Scrope, his broad blue eyes flashing eagerly. “I am the worst player in Europe.”

“ By all means,” says Lenore, with *empressment*, glaring angrily across at Paul, though there are tears in her treacherous eyes. “ I should like nothing better.”

“ *Not for worlds !*” says Sylvia, with a little emphasis on the words, rising, and gathering together her gloves, fan, and scent bottle. “ I would not expose my poor little manœuvres to *Paul’s* criticism for any earthly consideration ; I do not mind *you* ; you are a child ; you are *nobody !*”

The guests are gone — “ Good-night time ” has come—we discreetly issue forth into the hall, and drink claret and sherry-and-water, while Paul and Lenore are saying it in the drawing-room. They do not, however, speak very low, as I overhear them.

“ One thing is certain, Paul,” says Lenore, playfully, but with a sort of uneasy dignity in her tone, “ and that is, that when

we are married we will not play cards ; I wish you would not be cross to me *before people*. I do not mind when we are by ourselves."

" I wish you would not call men by their Christian names under my very nose," Paul answers, in a tone that sounds half-jealous, half-ashamed.

" Do you ?" (rather coquettishly).

" Lenore, how many men *do* you call by their Christian names ?"

She laughs mischievously. " Ever so many ; but I only do as I am done by ; almost every man I know calls me Lenore. No ! no !! no !!!" (her tone suddenly changing to one of repentant alarm) ; " do not look so furious—I am only joking ; nobody does that I am aware of—hardly anybody !"



CHAPTER VII.

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

“**A** CHILD might play with me to-night, I feel so bland,” says Lenore. “Tommy, Bobby, now is your time; never, probably, will you find Aunty Lenore in such a frame of mind again; drive her hair-pins into her skull, throttle her with your fat arms, ride rough-shod over her prostrate body; she will not utter a groan!”

It is the day following Sylvia's dinner-party. Lenore is sitting on the white hearthrug of our sister's boudoir, an *im-*

moral-looking little upstairs room. Looped rose curtains; lazy low chairs; mirrors gleaming through festooned white muslin; flowers that give out their scent delicately yet heavily to the warmed air; and outside the storm-rain scouring the pane, and the wind shaking the shutters with its strong rude hands. "Had ever any one better cause to be happy than I?" says the girl, while her eyes dance in the firelight. "I am nineteen, I am handsome, I am going to a ball, and shall dance all night, and eat ices, and sit in corners with the dearest fellow in all the world, who is extremely pleased with me."

"Instinct tells me that he dances like a pair of tongs," reply I, amiably.

Lenore reddens.

"Poor Jemima!" she says, with a sort of resentful pity. "No wonder you say spiteful things! You are twenty-nine; you are *first* with nobody! how can you

bear to go on living ? what *can* you have to think about all day and all night ?”

“Think about !” repeat I, cynically. “Oh, I do not know. Sometimes my latter end, and sometimes my *dinner*.”

“Poor old Jemima !”

“It is a mercy,” continue I, reflectively, “that one’s *palate* outlives one’s *heart* ; one can still relish red mullet when one has lost all appetite for moonshine.”

“Bravo, Miss Herrick,” cries a voice, as Scrope emerges from behind the *portière*, which hides a little inner room, and lounges with something of his old sleepy manner to the fire. We both start.

“Who gave you leave to come here ?” asks Lenore, sharply. “Why did not you cough, or sneeze, or sigh, to let us know you were there, instead of meanly listening to all we had to say ?”

“Neither of you said anything either confidential, or that demanded contradic-

tion," replies the young man, leaning his back against the chimney-piece, and looking down with *insouciant* defiance on the girl at his feet. "You, Miss Lenore, modestly observed that you were nineteen and very handsome, while Miss Jemima remarked that red mullet were better than moonshine, and that Le Mesurier danced like a pair of tongs ; in both cases I have the good fortune to agree with her."

"You have, have you?"

"You are roasting all the life out of that bit of deutzia in your dress," says the young man, indicating with a slight motion of the hand the white flower that, resting on Lenore's breast, contrasts the dark folds of her serge gown ; "suppose you give it me?"

"Suppose I do not!"

"You will really, won't you?" (stooping forward a little, and stretching out his hand to receive the demanded gift).

“*Most certainly not!*”

“All right!” (resuming his former position, and speaking with languid indifference); “it is a half-withered little vegetable, and I am not sure that I would take it now if you offered it me; but all the same, I have a conviction that before the evening is over it will be mine.”

“You have, have you?” cries Lenore, with flashing eyes; “sooner than that *you* should ever have it—look here!”

She runs to the window, unbolts the shutters, and opening the casement throws the flower out into the wild sleet. Thrice the winter’s cold gust drives it back against her, but the third time it disappears. Then she shuts the window, and returns to the fire.

“What a fine thing it is to have a spirit!” says Scrope, walking to the door. He does not look particularly vexed, but his cheek is flushed.

When he is gone, I retire behind the *portière* to write letters ; Lenore maintains her former position, thinking, smiling to herself, and curling the pug's tight fawn tail round her fingers. In about ten minutes the door re-opens, and Mr. Scrope again enters. His boots are miry, his shooting-coat is drenched, large rain drops shine and glisten on his bare gold curls, but in his hand he holds the bit of *deutzia*, muddied, stained, dis-petaled almost past recognition, but still the identical spray that floated out on the storm blast through the opened window.

"My presentiments seldom deceive me," says the young man, advancing to the fire, speaking with his old drawl, and wiping the luckless flower with his pocket-handkerchief ; "feel how wet I am" (extending his coat sleeve).

Silence.

"I am sorry I was so long," continues

he, spreading his hands to the blaze ; but it was ill work grubbing among the dark wet garden-borders ; the rain put out my eyes, and hissed in my ears, but, don't you know one hates to be beaten ? ”

I peep at them through the *portière*. Lenore has sprung to her feet, and stands facing him. “ Give it me back ! ” she cries, imperiously.

“ Most certainly not, as you tersely observed just now.”

“ Give it me *this instant !* ” with a stamp, advancing a step nearer, and trying to snatch it out of his hand.

“ *Au contraire* ” (holding it high above her head). “ I mean to dry it in silver paper, and inscribe upon it, ‘ Souvenir from Miss Lenore ! ’ ”

“ I will give you *any* other instead of it,” says Lenore, dropping her Xantippe tone, and growing conciliatory. “ I will even pin it in your coat to-night. There ! ”

“Thanks. I have contracted a particular penchant for this one.”

She does not repeat her entreaties, but I see her face working.

“Why are you so anxious to have it back?” asks Scrope, tormentingly, standing close to her on the hearthrug; “don’t snatch—it is unladylike—it is wet, it is limp, it is deader than a door-nail.”

“Paul gave it me!” cries the girl, bursting into a storm of tears. “You know he did; and he will be so angry when he sees you with it.”

He tosses it contemptuously to her: “Take it! I would not have it at a gift. You told me once that you never cried, and this is the *second* time in two days that I have seen you in tears.”

They have forgotten all about me. He is leaning his elbow on the mantelshelf, and staring morosely at her, as she wipes her eyes.

“ The *second* time !” (looking up at him with the tears still sparkling on her lashes).

“ What do you mean ?”

“ Do you think I did not see your red eyes at luncheon yesterday ?” asks Scrope, scornfully. “ You sat with your back to the light, and laughed more than usual, but you did not deceive *me*.”

She turns half away, looking put out at the accusation, which she is unable to rebut.

“ What had you been quarrelling about ?” asks the young man, eagerly ; “ as usual, about *me* ?”

“ You are right,” she answers, turning her great angry grey eyes upon him ; “ it *was* about you ; it is *always* about you ; if it were not for you, we should never have a word ! Why do you insist on *thrusting* yourself between him and me ? Why do you not go away ? There are a dozen other places where, I daresay, you would

be welcome. Why cannot you leave this one, where you *must* see that you are in the way?"

"May I ask how?" His voice is cold, but it is the cold of strangled emotion.

"Did not I tell you a hundred times at Dinan what a bore and a nuisance I thought you?" asks the girl, half in bitter jest, half in earnest. "Why do you make me say these rude things to you over again?"

He looks at her steadfastly. "You mean them *now*; you did *not* mean them then."

"Did not I?" (indignantly) "ask Jemima."

"Lenore" (his lips growing white) "you said 'go,' but as I stand here, I swear your eyes said 'stay.'"

"They did not!" she cries, passionately; "they *never* did; if they had—if they ever

had been so unfaithful to him, I would have *torn* them out !”

“ Did you think me a *bore* and a *nuisance*, when I lay at your feet those summer mornings under the chestnuts on Mont Parnasse, and read ‘*Manfred*’ to you ?”

“ *That* I did,” she answers, with vicious emphasis. “ Why I *slept* half the time, and dislocated my jaw with yawning the other half ! Not one man in a hundred can read poetry, and *you* ” (bursting out into angry laughter)—“ you rolled your *R*’s, and ranted with the best of them.”

Mr. Scrope turns sharply away, to hide his bitter mortification.

“ Why do not you go ?” continues Lenore, with her startling candour ; “ it cannot be very amusing to you being here now ; the partridges are so wild that you cannot get near them, and Sylvia never has any pheasants—go ! go !”

Again he turns and faces her. "Are you serious?" he says, while all his boyish face twitches. "I know you never stick at saying anything that will hurt your fellow-creatures' feelings, but do you really mean that you wish me to leave this house?"

"I do, *distinctly*."

"That the sight of me takes away your appetite, or *his*, which is it?"

"Both."

"Miss Lenore" (dropping his sneering tone, and trying to take her hand), "I have been impertinent to you. I own it. I had no right to sneer at him behind his back—it was mean and womanish of me; but—but—you were a little friendly to me at Dinan, and it is hard to be shelved all in a minute."

"At Dinan you were never anything more than a *pis aller*."

"If I promise never to address you unless you first speak to me," says the young

fellow, entreatingly ; “ not to look at you more than I can help ; to be no more to you than the footman who hands you soup, will you let me stay then ? ”

“ Fiddlesticks ! ” replies she, with plain common sense ; “ nobody can *efface* themselves in the way you describe ; staying in the house with a person one must be brought into constant contact with them. I say again—I say it *three times*—go ! GO ! GO ! ”

“ I will go, then, ” answers Scrope, steady-ing his voice with a great effort, and speaking with cold quiet ; “ but I will not go unpaid. Yes ; I will go, but on one only condition.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ That you dance with me to-night—not a beggarly *once*, as you might with Webster, or any other bowing acquaintance, but *three*—*four* times.”

“ I will do nothing of the kind, I will

have no bargaining with you," replies Lenore, with dignity.

"Then I will stay," cries Scrope, with angry excitement. "Miss Lenore, it is not *your* house; you cannot have me turned out of doors, much as you would wish it; eyesore as I am to you, I will stay!"

"Do!" she says, with a contemptuous sneer; "it will be a gentlemanlike act, of a piece with the rest of your conduct."

("That was a nasty one," think I, from behind the *portière*.)

There is a moment's silence.

"Say no more bitter things," says Scrope, in a changed rough voice; "if you tried from now till the judgment-day, you never could beat that last; and the worst of it is that it was true; it *was* ungentlemanlike; but when one has gone mad, one is not particular about one's manners, as perhaps *you* will discover some fine day."

Lenore is silent.

"Make your mind easy, I will go: to-night if you wish."

"There is no such wonderful hurry: to-morrow will do perfectly."

"To-morrow, then."

"Thanks."

"Lenore" (speaking with cutting emphasis), "you are the handsomest woman in the world, and the one who has the knack of saying the nastiest things; if your face drives men mad, your tongue brings them back to sanity pretty quickly; other women's sharp speeches pour off one like water: *yours* bite and sting."

"Perhaps" (indifferently).

A little stillness.

Again I peep. Scrope has sat down by the table: his elbows rest on the Utrecht velvet cover, among all Sylvia's silly little knick-knacks: his hands shade his face.

"Don't look so tragic!" says my sister, in a mollified voice, sidling up to him; "I

own that I thought of myself *first* ; I always do ; it is my way ; but if you could have sense to perceive it, you would see that it is quite as much for your interest as mine that you should go ;—my dear boy ” (laying her hand on his coat-sleeve), “ I have a horrible suspicion that you are *crying* ! please disabuse me of it.”

“ Nothing is further from my thoughts,” says Scrope, lifting his head and showing his beautiful face, undisfigured, indeed by tears, but paled and altered by anger and pain. “ Good God ! ” (looking at her fiercely) “ a man *would* be a fool to cry about you ; would you ever cease laughing and jeering at him ? ”

“ Stop raving at me,” cries Lenore, whose patience is fast oozing out, “ I have done nothing : you have been a fool, and you must pay for it ; perhaps——” (speaking very slowly, as if the words were not sweet to her lips), “ I wish to be quite fair

—perhaps—at Dinan—I *helped* you to be so—a little.”

He does not speak.

“Charlie ! look here !” (speaking with a soothing, sisterly tone), “*you* know, and *I* know, and Jemima knows, and I am afraid Paul knows, that sixty times a day you are on the verge of making a fool of yourself ; is not it better that you should go, before you tumble over the verge ?”

“All right,” answers he, impatiently, shaking off her hand : “I am going : having gained that point, I think the least you might do is to leave me alone.”

“But—but you will come to the ball to-night ?”

“No ” (very curtly).

“You *must*, it will look so *odd* !”

“Odd it *may* look, then : at the present moment ” (laughing disagreeably), “my whole life looks oddly enough, I can tell you.”

“ But supposing I give you *one* dance ! a quadrille ? ” (unable, woman-like, to let well alone, and kneeling down on the floor beside him).

“ I would not walk through a quadrille with you ” (speaking very loftily) “ if you were to go down on your knees to me ! ”

“ As I am doing at the present moment,” replies Lenore, laughing, “ a valse, then ? ”

“ Are you serious ? Do you mean it ? ” (catching hold of her two hands, while his eyes lit up) “ or are you only making a fool of me, as you have been doing without intermission for the last six months ? ”

“ One never knows what may happen,” replies the girl, oracularly, already rather repenting her concession ; “ perhaps—the fag end—the very fag end of a gallop, if you will not expect to take me into tea afterwards.”

“ Do not ! ” cry I, dropping my pen, and hurrying from my lurking-place. “ Lenore ;

for the first time in your life, take advice !
let this poor boy go to-night !"

As I had surmised, they had forgotten my existence. Both look at me with the partial fondness with which it is usually an interloper's fate to be regarded.

"Meddlesome Matty!" cries my sister, with her usual amenity, "who asked *your* opinion?"

"Miss Jemima," says Scrope, reproachfully, "I thought *you* were my friend!"

"So I am," I say, smiling and turning to him, "if she dances with you once, twice, a dozen times to-night, how much the better will you be to-morrow? You will have set us all by the ears, while you——" I pause.

Neither speaks.

"It is useless disguising from ourselves," continue I, with my usual excellent common sense, "that Paul will be displeased."

"Let him be displeased then, if he can

be so irrational !" cries Lenore, cheeks on fire and eyes burning ; " but no ! what am I talking about ? Paul has perfect confidence in me : if I were to dance all night with Charlie Scrope, or Charlie anybody else, he would not mind, he would understand."

" Time will show," reply I, mystically, walking to the door.

I will give you *four* dances, four *round* ones—there !" says Lenore, with a brilliant smile and a triumphant glance at me as I leave the room ; "*Vogue la galère !*"





CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

IT is time to go to the ball ; all are ready ; all are in the hall save Lenore. The men have each two pairs of white kid gloves in their pocket ; one has plain gold studs, the other diamond and black enamel ; but, oh, how poor, how small are man's highest adornments compared to woman's ! At his best, in his dress of greatest ceremony, he is but a scrimping, black-forked biped, compared to the indefinite volume, the many-coloured

majesty, of beflounced, belaced, beflowered woman.

“Did you tell her we were all waiting?” asks Sylvia, in a tone of impatience.

“I did,” replies Jemima, stepping leisurely downstairs with a large mat, which her train has carried down from the upper regions, attached to her tail.

“And what did she say?”

“She said, ‘Hurry no man’s cattle!’”

“Was she nearly ready?”

“I don’t know.”

“What was she doing?”

“She was advancing and retreating before her long glass, ascertaining whether her petticoats were all of a length.”

“There is plenty of time,” says Scrope; “not ten yet. I remember once going to a ball in the country, and finding myself the first person there. It was an awful sensation!”

“Are you sure that I should not look better

with a *fichu*?" says Sylvia, in an anxious aside, to her sister, getting out of earshot of the men, and craning her throat to get a view, over her shoulder-blades, at the back of her own neck. "Am I too *décolletée* behind? You know that there is nothing in life I have such a horror of as being called a 'frisky matron!'"

"It does look rather *juvenile*, perhaps," replies Jemima, unkindly saying the exact reverse of what she knows is expected of her.

Sylvia's countenance falls a little.

"*Juvenile!*" Oh, that was not what I meant in the least! I asked Charlie Scrope what he thought" (smiling a little), "and he said, 'You look *awfully jolly!*' He said it *quite loud*. I am sure I don't know what Paul could have thought. I suppose one ought not to have asked him his opinion, poor boy, because he *always* thinks one looks nice, whatever one has on."

“Does he?” “Jemima,” (lowering her voice, and speaking with eager sincerity,) “promise to tell me everything that you hear anybody say of *me* to-night, and I will promise to tell you everything I hear anybody say of *you*.”

Jemima does not answer; her eyes are fixed on the stairs, on which a vision has appeared, above whose head two lady's-maids are triumphantly holding flat candlesticks, to aid the bright gaslight which is already illumining her; a vision, like a summer night, dark, yet softly splendid. Lenore, all in black, with great silver lilies starring her hair, shining on her breast, garlanding her skirts. As she comes stepping daintily down, she does not look conscious—*very* handsome people seldom do; it is a prerogative reserved for faintly and doubtfully pretty ones. In her hand she carries a huge bouquet of white and purple flowers. All stare at her; but she seems

to see only Paul. She goes straight up to him, her eyes shining like soft lamps, and her cheeks all rosy with happiness.

“ Thank you *so* much,” she says, in a low voice. “ I was surprised—and yet *not* surprised—when Nicholls came to my room and said, ‘ Here’s a bouquet for you, ma’am.’ I knew in a minute, of course. I did not even take the trouble to ask whom it was from ; I *knew*, naturally.”

As she talks, Paul’s complexion varies and his countenance changes ; but she goes on, without giving him time to speak.

“ How did you come to know all my favourite flowers ? was it intuition or did I ever tell you ? I forget. Violets, Roman narcissi, white hyacinths—all the scents that I am most wild about. There ! ” (holding up the bouquet to his face) “ you may have *one* sniff, one *little* sniff at it—only a little one, mind ! ”

“ Lenore,” says Paul, in a mortified voice,

looking red and miserable, "it was not I. I know nothing about it. To tell you the truth, I never thought of such a thing!"

Had they been alone he would have added fond apologies; would have told her—what was the truth—that had he thought they would have given her pleasure, he would have bought her a thousand bouquets, each much bigger than a haystack; would have sent to Kamschatka for them, did bigger fairer flowers grow there than here; but, as three people are by, his pride restrains him.

"*Not you?*" repeats Lenore, in a blank voice, as her arm and the now valueless posy drop to her side. "Who was it, then? Oh, of course," (following Scrope, who has turned to the fire to hide the scarlet tinge that has spread from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck) "it was *you!* I am right *this* time! Thanks so much for thinking of me."

She stretches out her hand to him, but her voice quivers.

These little disappointments are sometimes acute, as a needle, though but a small weapon, can give a sharp prick.

There is nothing further to delay the cloaking and shawling, which forthwith takes place. Paul and Lenore stand together alone for a minute.

"They have no longer the same smell," says the girl, eyeing her nosegay with a disenchanted look; "the narcissi's petals are already beginning to yellow and the maiden hair to shrivel. Oh, you bad, *bad* Paul! just as I began to think that you must really be getting a little fond of me!"

"Don't talk such nonsense," replies Paul, brusquely; "cannot you see with half an eye, that I am in a greater rage with myself than you can possibly be with me? But Lenore" (hesitating a little),

“now that you know that *I*—fool that I was—did not get it for you, are you still going to take it?”

“Of course I am,” replies Lenore, decisively, “though it is the bouquet of disappointment it gives a nice finish to one’s toilet; if” (with a coquettish pout) “one is not provided with *legitimate* bouquets one must console oneself with illegitimate ones.”

It is an Infirmary Ball; one of those balls, therefore, at which, in *theory*, gentle and simple meet and frolic with happy equality and unity; at which, in *practice*, the gentle glide gracefully about at the top of the room, and the simple plunge and caper at the bottom. There is more air, more space, more everything that is desirable, at the lower end near the doors, but to remain at that end is to confess an affinity with the butchers, the bakers, the haberdashers, of the good city of Norley. At

the expense of any amount of elbowing, pushing, bruising, one must work one's way up to where one's peers sit enthroned on red-cloth benches. They are rather late. Slowly they work up. Paul escorts Lenore ; Scrope, Sylvia ; Jemima, herself. A galop is playing, and a hundred, two hundred people, are floundering, flying, and bounding round, as nature and their dancing-master have taught them. Little women burying their noses in big men's coat-sleeves ; big women trying not to rest their chins on the top of little men's heads ; men who hold their partner's hand out, like a pump-handle, sawing the air with it up and down ; men who hold their partner's hand on their own hip, describing an acute angle with the elbow ; men who hug their partners like polar bears ; men who hold their partners uncomfortably tumbling out of their arms, as if they were afraid of coming near them ; men who run

round their partners, men who kick, men who scratch, men who knock knees;—every variety, in fact, of the human animal, rushing violently round, doing their best to make themselves giddy and tear their clothes.

“Are you going to dance this with me, or are you not?” asks Lenore, impatiently; “because, if not, I will ask some one else—I mean, I will make some one else ask me.”

“Of course I am.”

“What are you waiting for then? why don’t you start? I am mad to begin! Tum te tum! if they play this air when I am in my coffin, I shall jump up and galop in my shroud.”

In a second more, the black and silver gown has joined the merry mad rout of reds and blues and greens and whites. After half a dozen turns Lenore pants a little, and says, “Stop.”

"That means that I dance badly," says Paul, releasing her from his arms.

"It means that I am never long-winded; doctors often say that I ought not to dance."

"Not really?" incredulously looking at her cheeks, carnationed by the movement of the dance—at her great clear eyes. "I say, Lenore, do I dance very atrociously? It is a thing that I do not do once in a month of Sundays."

"Not *very*," replies Lenore, rather slowly; "you have not quite got into my step yet, but that will come." (Then, seeing him look a little mortified) "You are not like Major Webster, who leaps his own height into the air every step he takes, and gets round the room in three *bounds*, like a kangaroo."

Paul laughs. "That *is* modest praise."

Meanwhile Sylvia has been safely piloted to the top of the room, and enthroned

between Mrs. Webster and another diamonded dowager. Jemima and Miss Webster remain standing. To take a seat is virtually to confess yourself shelved ; to remain standing, is an advertisement that you are still to be had.

“ You won’t take a turn, I suppose ? ” Scrope says to Mrs. Prodgers, as he prepares to saunter away.

She has so often announced her intention of not dancing that he thinks the invitation—in itself dissuasively worded—may be safely hazarded. But human prescience is often at fault.

“ Would you mind holding my bouquet for me, dear Mrs. Webster ? ” says Sylvia, getting down with some alacrity from her bench. “ Thanks so much ! You see ” (with a little affected shrug), “ I am fated not to be left in peace. It seems a little hard upon the girls, doesn’t it ? but one cannot *pass on* one’s partners, can one ? ”

they would not like it. I assure you I had no more idea of dancing—but one gets so tired of saying ‘No,’ ‘No,’ ‘No,’—such an old friend too—you need not smile—he is, *really!*”

“Quite right, my dear, quite right!” replies Mrs. Webster, nodding good-humouredly. She is very comfortably perched herself, and she has long given up her daughter as a bad job. “I only wish that Miss *Jemima* could find a partner too—where is James?” (standing up on the raised foot-board, whence she can get a commanding view over the company’s heads); “he was here a minute ago, and he had no partner then—his had thrown him over—I am sure he would be most happy!”

“Oh! no, no, no, thanks!” replies *Jemima*, in a frenzy at the thought of being crammed down James’ unwilling throat. “I am quite happy, I assure you! I *like*

looking on ; it amuses me, and some one will be sure to turn up just now."

Miss Webster smiles ; she always does : she has smiled through eight and thirty years of hope deferred. Callow boys and fat old married men are her sheet-anchor, and she is on the look-out for such now.

The dance ends ; the sound of scampering and shuffling ceases suddenly ; people's voices drop from *bawling* pitch to their natural key ; everybody streams to the doors. The house seems to have been built for the express purpose of furthering love-making. From the ball-room long corridors diverge in every direction, dimly lit ; and out of these corridors open many quiet rooms, also dimly lit.

" Let us go into the passages !" cries Lenore, " and I will show you all the holes and corners, where I perpetrated my worst atrocities in flirtation last year."

" On the same principle, I suppose,"

replies Paul, laughing, “ which makes a man always take his second wife to visit the tomb of his first ?”

They find a bench, retired, yet not lonely, where, in shade themselves, they can see men and girls, men and girls, men and girls, go trooping by ; couples flirting, couples not flirting, couples trying to flirt, couples trying *not* to flirt. It is a bench that only holds two people ; well armed, well cushioned, where, half hidden behind Lenore’s spread fan, they lean together and whisper gaily.

“ Paul ! Paul ! do you see that girl ?—how dirty the body of her dress is ?”

“ Cannot say that I remarked it.”

“ It *is*, though ; as dirty as the ground. She and her sisters always make a point of coming to these balls in filthy dresses, to mark the distinction between themselves and the clean, crisp, townspeople.”

“ It is patrician dirt, is it ? I respect it.”

“Do you see that big person in pink? Last year she went to the Assembly in a wreath of *mistletoe*; you may imagine the consequences.”

Paul laughs.

“Her partner always gets very drunk. Last time I saw him was in the Ansons’ supper-room; he was sitting on a lump of ice, crying bitterly.”

“Lenore, why are you hiding your face?”

“Hush! hush! young Anson is coming this way; he would be sure to ask me to dance, and dancing with him is like going into a *battle*, without the glory.”

Young Anson passes safely by, looking neither to the right hand nor the left.

“I breathe again. Paul!” (edging a little nearer to him, and dropping her voice, more for the pleasure of whispering than from any dread of being overheard); “Paul, do you mean to let me dance when we are married?”

“ H’m ! I shall see.”

“ We shall not be able to go to many balls,” says Lenore, sighing, “ for we shall have no clothes.”

“ Speak for yourself.”

“ We must stay at home, and have tea and shrimps ; of course, we shall not be able to afford dinner.”

“ Shall not we ? ” (looking rather aghast).
“ Does dinner cost more than tea and shrimps ? ”

“ Of course it does ; shrimps are only fourpence a pint ? ”

Paul shudders.

“ Could not you make it *prawns* ? ”

“ Certainly not ; tea and shrimps it must be—perhaps watercresses in the height of the season—and after tea, you will read the paper in carpet slippers—not the *Times*—we shall not be able to afford the *Times*—but some penny paper—and I shall sit opposite you, with my hair *flat to my head*,

and low down over my ears—is not that it ?
—hemming a duster !”

“ I no not believe you *can* hem.”

The music has struck up again : Lancers, this time. Fewer couples trail and saunter by : most have returned to the ball-room. The fiddles’ sharp loud squeak comes more softly to their ears ; the merry cadence and marked time of the Lancers ; then the little pause in the music, that tells one, without one’s seeing, that the girls are all courtesying, and the men, with arms linked together, are galloping madly round, like savages before a wooden god.

Lenore’s eyes dance softly, too, in this dusk place.

“ Lenore, I have a favour to ask you.”

“ Not a very big one, I hope.”

“ *You* will think it immense.”

“ What is it ?”

“ That you will dance with no one but me, to-night.”

He had expected her to accede with eager alacrity, but on the contrary, she says nothing.

“I know that I dance badly, *vilely*,” continues Paul, colouring a little. “I have long suspected it, and to-night” (laughing a little) “I learned it *for a certainty*, from your face, and from the eagerness with which you engaged me in conversation in the pauses of the dance, to hinder me from starting afresh. But why *should* we dance? *Could* we be better off than we are now?”

“Not easily,” she says, and says it truly; but she still evades replying to his request.

“I want to have a feast of your society to-night,” says Paul, earnestly; “think what a fast I have had!—six months! We seem to know each other so little yet, and even *there*,” (giving a vague nod to express Sylvia’s abode), “jolly as it is, we

never seem to get five minutes' talk, without Jemima bouncing in at one door, or Sylvia ambling in at another, or those imps of Satan rushing in and playing the devil's tattoo on one's shins."

"Children of Belial!" says Lenore, tersely. "Good heavens, Paul! how I hate the young of the human species! Don't you?"

Paul looks rather shocked. "Don't say that—it is unwomanly."

"Of course," retorts she, sarcastically, "to a man they may be imps of Satan, but to the ideal woman they must always be cherubs—biting, kicking, scratching cherubs—but *cherubs* always. By-the-by, Paul" (with a sudden change of tone), "how *is* the ideal woman? Have you seen her lately?"

Paul turns his head away, and says, "Fiddlesticks!"

"Paul, Paul! I have an idea! How

red you are ! Look me in the face—don't turn the back of your head to me. Is it *she* that wears her hair flat, and eschews *frisettes* ?”

Paul turns rounds as bidden. His face is undeniably red ; he is not laughing, and his eyes are rather defiant. “ What if it is ? ”

“ Does she wear a poke bonnet ? ”

“ Perhaps ! ”

“ And a grey cloak down to her heels.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I know all about her,” says Lenore, resentfully, her eyes flashing and cheeks ablaze ; “ a puritanical little prig ! ”

“ I do not see what good it does you abusing a person you have never seen,” says Paul, in a rather surly voice, “ nor what it has to say to whether you are willing to sacrifice this one evening to me or not.”

“Certainly not!” replies the girl, angrily; “why should I? What have you done to deserve it? Yesterday you scolded me till I cried—everybody saw my red eyes; to-day you forgot the common civility of getting me a bouquet; and you are always trotting out another woman’s virtues and beauties at my expense. *Certainly not!* I will dance like a Mœnad with all my old friends.”

Paul’s forehead wrinkles into a frown, and his mouth turns down, as is his way when extremely vexed. “All right! Do!” he says, in a constrained voice. She had spoken with petulant half-meaning; had expected to be coaxed, entreated, scolded even, out of her perverse determination; but he employs neither coaxings, entreaties, nor scoldings—he acquiesces with dumb pride. They sit side by side in sullen silence, till disturbed by the sound of approaching voices, feet, and the

long rustle and swish of a woman's infinite gown.

"You must take me back to the ball-room," Sylvia is saying, as she flutters her fan and smiles; "you must indeed. If people come out and find us sauntering about here they will be sure to say that I am flirting with you, and there is nothing in life that I should dislike so much as that—oh! here you are!"

Both are too sulky to answer.

"Not been dancing? Very wise of you! Look how much better you have come off than I!—in ribbons absolutely in tatters. And Charlie has got a yard and a half of me in his pocket, have not you?" She looks up at him playfully, with round complacent eyes, and then stops suddenly.

To even Sylvia's comprehension it is evident that he has not heard a word she has been saying; his eyes are fixed with

steady intentness on Lenore. Paul is gazing vacantly down the long vista of the fast refilling corridors. "Are you engaged for the next dance, Miss Lenore?"

"What is it?" (nonchalantly) "a quadrille?"

"It is a valse."

She peeps at Paul, out of the corner of one eye; not a sign of relenting on the ill-tempered gravity of his face. Well! she can be as cross and sulky as he, at a pinch.

"No—I am not."

"Will you let me have it?"

"Certainly."

"Shall I be likely to find you here still after I have taken Mrs. Prodgers back to the ball-room?"

"I will not trouble you," replies Sylvia, rather offended at the slight hint of anxiety to be rid of her, unintentionally implied in these last words. "I am going" (with a coquettish smile) "to put myself under

Paul's protection. Do you hear, Paul ? I am going to put myself under your protection. You are not going to dance ? No ? Neither will I. We will sit here and criticise everybody—yes, we will talk you both well over ” (shaking her bouquet at Scrope) ; “ if your ears burn you will know what to attribute it to.”

Lenore has risen, and while Sylvia is speaking she bends and whispers maliciously to Paul, “ Pleasant meditations on poke bonnets and flat heads to you ! ”

He does not take the slightest notice.

She puts her hand on Scrope's arm, and walks off. Twice, thrice, she looks back, but not once has she the satisfaction of detecting her lover's eyes wistfully seeking hers. Silently they enter the ball-room and join the just beginning whirl. Lenore is thoroughly out of tune—angry with herself, enraged with Paul, furious with Scrope. If any hole can be picked in his perform-

ance, he may be quite sure that she will not spare him. She is, however, deprived of that satisfaction. Scrope's performance is as much above praise as Paul's was below blame. He dances superbly. It is a small accomplishment, and does not add much to a man's social value, but in a ball-room it is the giver of great joy. Once in his arms, a delightful sense of security and strength comes over Scrope's partner; a blessed certainty of immunity from jostling; of being borne along steadily, rapidly, buoyantly, with the swift smoothness of a swallow's flight; all trouble taken off her hands, and only pleasure left. Lenore loves dancing *intensely*; with an intensity, indeed, seldom met with among sad and sober Englishwomen. On her, the mere music, motion, and measure of the dance have an effect verging on intoxication. Down the long room they fly together; the floor seems nothing to them; they are float-

ing on air, while the music swells loud and sighs faint, bursts into mad merriment and dies in voluptuous complaints. Lenore has forgotten her anger—has forgotten even Paul; all feelings are merged in one of acute sensuous enjoyment—a feeling languid, yet exciting; luxurious, yet exhilarating. Many couples who set off at the same time as they did are standing still to rest, panting and breathless; but they still fly on, with untired joyous grace.

“ Shall we stop? Am I tiring you?” Scrope asks.

“ No, no! Go on, go on!”

“ I wish to heavens it could go on *forever!*” says the young man, losing his head, and foolishly whispering into the white ear that is so temptingly close to his face.

The spell is broken.

“ Stop!” says Lenore imperatively. He obeys, and stands gravely beside her, his broad chest heaving a little with his late

exertions ; some strong suppressed excitement giving an expression, painful yet eminently becoming to his straight-cut Greek face.

“ I thought you said you were not tired ? ”

“ No more I am.”

“ Why did you say ‘ stop ’ then ? ”

“ Because you were beginning to be a fool.”

“ I began that long ago ; six months ago, in church ; in Guingamp cathedral—if you wish to be exact.”

“ You went on being a fool, then ? ”

“ I said that I wished this valse could last for ever, and I stick to it,” says the young man, doggedly. “ I do wish it.”

“ Tastes differ,” says Lenore, scornfully. “ I know nothing that I should dislike more than an eternity of capering with you ? ”

He bites his lip hard, but attempts no retort.

"Shall we take another turn?" says Lenore, presently; mollified by his silence, after an interval spent by her in tapping with her feet and beating time to the music. "That is to say, if you will promise not to be a fool."

"I promise nothing."

"Well, then, we must risk it, I suppose," replies she, with a careless laugh. "Mind, it is no compliment to you. It is solely for my own satisfaction; for though you may be a fool you dance like a seraph, and I cannot bear to lose a bar of this."

Away, again, light as a feather; as if blown by the breath of the music. Once off—her anger unroused again by any rash remarks from her partner—the same sense of delicious enervation as before, steals over Lenore. It is like floating on a summer sea, as the music whispers, whispers, then laughs out and triumphs, in a loud glad clash.

And Scrope—every dog has his day, they say, and this is his. It is a wretched little day ; but still it is his. She may be Paul's for all after life—nay, she will be, of course ; who can hinder her ? But for these divine mad minutes she is his ! It is not *Paul's* arm that is round her waist ; it is not *Paul's* heart against which hers is panting ; it is not *Paul's* shoulder on which the milk-white beauty of her arm is lying.

All earthly pleasures must end, and a valse is, in its very essence, one of the shortest. The music ceases. As they turn towards the door they come face to face with Paul. He makes as though he would pass them without speaking ; but Lenore addresses him :

“ What have you done with Sylvia ? ”

“ She is dancing.”

“ And you ? Why are not you ? ”

“ Because I *hate* it ! ” (emphatically.)

“ You might have given Jemima a turn ;

she very seldom gets a partner, and she likes dancing.”

“Even with *me* ?” (with a sneer.)

“I wish you a better temper,” says Lenore hastily, moving on.

They pass out into the passage.

“Why have you come here ?” cries the girl fretfully ; “it is draughty. I shiver ; let us go back to Sylvia—to Mrs. Webster—*anywhere !*”

“You do not shiver when you are with other men,” says Scrope, resentfully.

“*Other* men do not stare at one, as if they were going to *eat* one !” cries the girl, indignantly. “Good heavens, Charlie ! how much better I liked you when you were only a stupid, silent, sulky boy, before you adopted these unpleasant man’s airs.”

In defiance of appearances, Scrope stands stock still ; he is young enough to be galled by allusions to his age.

“Lenore,” he says, almost imperatively,

“stop gibing at me ; after to-night, I give you *carte blanche* to abuse me as much as you please behind my back—to mimic me for your friends’ amusement—to show me up in as humiliating a light as it pleases you—you are quite capable of it—but, *for to-night, be civil.*”

“Mend your own manners, then,” cries the girl, tartly. “Who gave you leave to call me ‘Lenore?’ For the last few days I have remarked that you have been slurring over the ‘Miss ;’ please to replace my style and title immediately.”

“Is it worth while,” asks the young fellow, more calmly, but with great bitterness, “is it worth while accustoming oneself to call you ‘Miss,’ when you will so soon be ‘Mrs.’? For all my future life, I swear to you, I will try to think of you only as ‘Mrs. Le Mesurier ;’ but, for to-night, be *Lenore*, plain *Lenore* !”

For all answer, she bursts out laughing.

“ Excuse me ; it is rude, I know ; but you reminded me so forcibly of the tale of the man at a ball, who, when the music stopped suddenly, was heard saying to his partner, at the top of his voice : ‘ Do not call me Mr. Smith ; call me *plain William* ! ’ and, as he was remarkably ugly, he was called ‘ *plain William* ’ ever after.”





CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

IN the meantime, Mrs. Prodgers has been restored to her eminent position on the bench : she has been danced and talked and walked about, into a state of even more than her usual complaisance.

Jemima still stands where she left her.

“ Have you been dancing, dear ? Yes ? Oh, I am *so* glad—I thought you would. I don’t know what has come to the people to-night ; they would tear one in pieces, if

one would let them. *One* thing I *do* set my face against, and that is, those passages. I said to young Anson, ‘There is no one fonder of laughing and talking, and fun, than I am, but if you talk from now till Doomsday you will not persuade me to sit out with you.’ I daresay there is no harm in it *really*, but people do let their tongues run on so, when a person is young and tolerable looking.”

Jemima makes no answer.

Sylvia’s conversation is like a Gregorian chant; there is a certain sameness about it.

Miss Webster has been valseing with an Eton boy, in a round jacket: her shins are black with bruises, her elbow is scratched, but at least she has not been a wallflower.

Another galop strikes up. Sylvia’s talk drops into silence; she fiddles with her bouquet, and tries to look as if she would

not dance if she were asked. Men hurry hither and thither, seeking for their promised partners ; raising and dashing in the same instant false hopes in unengaged girls, by making apparently straight for them, staring hard at them, and then flying off at a tangent on discovering that they are not the right ones. Jemima scans the crowd to see whether she can discover any one likely to ask her (in many women the love of dancing survives the probability of being invited), but finding no one, resigns herself with philosophy to her fate. Other people's enjoyment is not so good as one's own, but it is perhaps better than none. It is some people's lot to be spectators through life. She looks on. The pink calico ; the laurels, the mirrors, the pretty rose-red ladies, the plunging grocers and floundering groceresses ; a tremendous *thud* !—two people fallen like one log ; now sprawling in a confused heap of broad-

cloth and illusion on the floor ; the lady has ingeniously wound herself, like swaddling clothes, round her squire's legs : she is unwound, feels for her head, settles her wreath, and off again ! There are so many people, and they go so quickly, that it is difficult to follow any one : a blue couple, a pink couple, a white couple ; they dazzle the eyeballs with the celerity with which they shoot across them ! A black couple—taller than most of the others ; the soft sparkle of silver flowers flashing like meteors down the room.

Why, it is Lenore ! Lenore and Scrope again !

“I thought I had understood that your sister's *fiancé* was a *plain* man,” says an old woman, who, unable to find room on a bench, is standing behind Jemima, and tapping her on her bare shoulder to attract her attention.

“Quite the contrary” (with a compli-

mentary smile). "Have you ever seen him?" asks Jemima.

"Is not it he with whom she is dancing?"

"Oh, dear no!"

"Really? What a stupid mistake! I thought it must be, because I have always seen them together. A cousin, no doubt?"

Jemima does not relieve her curiosity. She affects not to hear.

Turning her head aside a little, she finds Paul at her elbow. Judging by his face, he has heard, apparently.

"Oh, there you are!" cries Sylvia, catching sight of him at the same moment and resuming her animation. "You are in disgrace, do you know, *deep* disgrace? You have not asked me to dance *once* to-night," (looking at him with large round eyes, and smiling archly).

Paul smiles too, but not very cheerfully.

“ My dancing is such that it is only on *very* old acquaintance that I dare inflict it.”

“ I saw you dancing with Lenore.”

He shrugs his shoulders.

“ I believe I *did* shamble round the room once or twice, but it was not a very successful experiment.”

After the dance, which is surely ten minutes longer than any galop that ever was played before, after a prolonged stroll in the corridors, after tea, Lenore returns to her *chaperone* ; returns, laughing and flushed, but with a look of uneasy excitement underlying the surface merriment of her face.

Paul has been waiting, with no outward sign of impatience on his grave sad face. He goes up to her.

“ May I have five minutes’ talk with you ? ” he asks formally.

She takes his arm, and they walk off.

Neither speaks till they reach the bench

on which, in the earlier and happier part of the evening, they had sat together, gaily chattering. Then Paul addresses her with cutting, cold politeness.

“May I ask, Lenore, what is inducing you to make yourself so remarkable with Scrope to-night? Is it solely for your own satisfaction, or for the double pleasure of amusing yourself and annoying me?”

The opening is not conciliatory. The colour rushes red and headlong to Lenore’s cheeks : she flings up her proud head.

“I killed two birds with one stone,” she says, in angry jest; “he dances like an *archangel*, and it makes you jealous.”

“I do not doubt your first assertion,” says Paul, more coldly than ever, “and I fully agree with your last; perhaps I am more prone to jealousy than other men. I have not been so used to women and their ways. But I confess I do not enjoy seeing my future wife hauled about by a man, who

is (as is evident to the most casual observer) making passionate and unrestrained love to her.”

She is about to interrupt him, but he stops her.

“I confess I do *not* relish seeing him pointed out as occupying the position which, till to-night, I supposed was mine.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean” (in a tone where the persuasive is quite swamped in the imperative) “that I distinctly *object* to your dancing with Scrope.”

“That is unfortunate,” retorts Lenore, to whose ears the imperative has been, from her youth up, an unknown mood, and whose gorge has always risen at the faintest attempt at coercion; “for I have every intention of dancing with him again—once—twice—if not more.”

“After the opinion I have just expressed?” cries Paul, his anger effectually

breaking through the armour of his coldness, voice raised, and grey eyes lightening.

"Most decidedly," she answers with distinct emphasis. "I am not in the habit of breaking my word, and last night I promised him that, on condition that he leaves Sylvia's house to-morrow, I would valse four times with him to-night—and valse four times with him I will!"

"You *promised* him?" repeats Paul, hardly any longer master of his indignation. "Am I to understand that you have been *making terms—bargaining* with him? How ought his comings or goings to affect you?"

"In this way," she answers, her lips quivering with anger, but articulating with slow clearness. "I have, or fancy I have, a considerable regard for you and a slight regard for him, and I have no wish to see you kick each other downstairs—a *dénoû-*

ment which is only a question of time as long as you are in the same house.”

“ Lenore ! ” (snatching her hand, and holding it with almost painful tightness, while his eyes glow bright and deeply angry in this dim place,) “ are you mad, or are you bent on driving *me* mad ? After what has often passed between us about that fellow, can you *dare* to tell me to my face that you have a regard for him ? ” Whom the Gods wish to destroy they first deprive of understanding.

“ *Dare !* ” she says, while her eyes meet his unflinchingly, though within, her spirit quails—her heart yearns to him in his honest anger. “ What an ugly word ! Yes, I *do* dare ! why should not I ? He is handsome, and I love to look at beautiful things and people ; he admires me blindly, and admiration is food and drink to me ; he can see no fault in me, and I hate to be eternally carped at, and picked holes in ! ”

“I see,” says Paul, dropping her hand, and speaking in a tone of smothered resentment, which (if she could, but have understood it) was more alarming than his outspoken anger, “I understand; you cannot see our unsuitability more clearly than I do; from the first, I felt it profoundly, and every day I live I feel it more. But Lenore, why” (grasping her arm with unconscious fierceness), “why—if, from the first, you only meant to torment me—why did you *make* me love you? There were hundreds of other victims that would have done you more credit. Why could not you leave *me* alone?”

“*Leave you alone!*” (turning as white as a sheet); “what do you mean?”

“I mean,” he answers firmly, “what you know as well as I do, that you could have hindered me from loving you, if you had wished; I was not given to falling in love; till I met you I hated ladies’ society; I

avoided women; I did not understand them, and they thought me a bore. I left them alone, and they left me alone; until you—solely for the gratification of your own vanity, as I now see—*made* me love you, against my wish, against my better judgment, as, for the same reason, no doubt, you have now made Scrope.”

She sits, with her head bent, silent; she cannot command her voice to answer.

“He is a more creditable conquest than I, I own,” continues Paul, bitterly; “but for all that you will be the ruin of him. When he joined me at Dinan he was as nice a boy and as good a fellow as ever lived; I looked upon him as a brother, and *he*—he swore by me! You have made him hate me! You have made me detest the sight of him! I congratulate you on your handiwork.”

She lifts her eyes to him, all the softness gone out of them, scintillating with anger.

"Have you done?" she asks, in a choked voice; "have you insulted me enough for one day?"

"I have not insulted you," he answers, resolutely, "unless God's truth be an insult; I never was a good hand at telling smooth lies; my love for you has never been blind enough to hinder my seeing that you are, in some respects, different from what I could wish you to be; if it is an insult to tell you so, I can only say it would have been a thousand times better if we had never met."

A pain like a knife goes through her HEART, but she makes no sign.

"I quite agree with you," she answers, commanding her voice into calmness by an immense effort; "will you be so kind as to take me back to Sylvia?"

He gives her his arm and they begin to retrace their steps; but before they have gone six paces he turns aside into one of

the rooms that open out of the passage. It is empty ; he shuts the door. His soul is in a tumult ; full, not indeed of the unnamed pain of Lenore's, but of confusion and doubt. If he marries this woman he will be a miserable man ; he has long suspected it, and choked back the suspicion ; to-night he has realised it—but yet—but yet—she is as beautiful as a summer moonrise—he cannot give her up without an effort. They are as much alone as if they were on a desert island ; he stands facing her.

“Lenore,” he says, earnestly, “let us understand one another. If this is only a silly quarrel, for Heaven's sake let us make it up ; if it is only a capricious way of trying how much I can stand, I tell you candidly that I am at the end of my tether ; I will not bear a feather's weight more ! Lenore, am I unreasonable ? I like a quiet life, and I want to trust my wife absolutely, and to believe in her as I believe in God. Tell

me, did you mean the things you said just now, or were you only angry? If you were, I am the last person that has any right to blame you. Oh, my dear, think before you answer me! Our whole two lives hang upon it."

She looks at him. His face is stern and resolute and deeply angered; but is it not also tender? She is all but melted; in a second more she would have been sobbing on his heart, but in the instant of hesitation his former words, "You *made* me love you," recur to her, bringing profound resentment with them. "I *did* mean them," she answers passionately. "I *do* mean them; it is so pleasant to me to find any one to like me *spontaneously* that I naturally prize their society."

His face pales and changes, it is no longer tender; it is *only* stern.

"All right," he says coldly; "you are at least explicit. It has come to this, then,

Lenore—you must choose between Scrope and me. I am far from saying that he is not a fitter mate for you than I. He is young, he is good-looking, he is rich, he has everything to catch a woman's eye and gain a woman's heart ; and I——” (looking down and sighing), “ well, I suppose I have not much. It has been as great a wonder to me as to the rest of the world what you could have seen in me—you know, I told you before I'm not up to woman's ways—but one thing is certain,” (lifting his head again, and speaking with firm emphasis,) “ *I will go shares with no man ; I will have all or none.* As long as you are my betrothed wife I *forbid* you to dance with Scrope.”

“ And I decline to be forbidden,” she cries, maddened by rage—by the internal knowledge of being in the wrong, and—oh, far worst, cruellest of all—by the conviction that he does not love her well enough to

take her, faults and all—that he will have her on his own terms or not at all, that he is going—if she persist in her pride—to give her up, and that the giving her up will not cost him his life—will not break his heart, or even cause it any very mortal pain. “I deny your right to employ such a word to me; if I were a hundred times your wife I should refuse to be ordered about like a dog. If you expect the tame docility of a slave you had better go to your cousin for it, for you certainly will not get it from me.”

He bows gravely.

“It is fortunate, at least, that we have discovered the discrepancy of our ideas of marriage before it is too late. Thank you, at least, for telling me now, instead of later.”

“Yes,” she answers, breathing hard and short; her face altered and contorted by the fatal excitement that is hurrying her to her destruction; “if I *made* you love me,

as you generously say, I will, at least, not *make* you marry me.”

He stands mute, all his face white and quivering, unable to master himself enough to reply to her gibes with calmness, and not willing to descend to the unmanliness of recrimination. Then at length he speaks, with a slow and bitter smile :

“You have given me a lesson that I shall not forget in a hurry. I confess that I had not thought myself a vain man, but to-night has proved me to have been egregiously misled by my own conceit. Do you know—you will hardly believe me—laugh at me, I give you leave—but for the last six months I have been reproaching myself with the thought that, well and heartily as I loved you, you loved me even better—that you were giving more than you received ? I am disabused ! Lenore,” (speaking very slowly, and planting each word like a sword-thrust in her heart)

“you are incapable of loving anyone but yourself—anything but your own will. *I have done with you !*”

As he speaks, unmindful of the usages of society, forgetting that she has asked him to take her back to her chaperone, he turns to leave her ; at the door he pauses to take one good-bye look at the fair proud woman he has resigned. Her eyes are gazing vacantly at him, and her lips seem moving. In a moment more he is gone. She remains in the same position in which he left her : she does not move a finger. Her great wide eyes keep staring at the door by which he went out, and her lips repeating his last words, “ I have done with you—done with you—done with you ! ” They do not convey the slightest meaning to her mind. By dint of saying them over and over again, they grow to sound unfamiliar, grotesque. She half laughs. How long she remains in this

semi-stunned state she does not know ; the fiddles squeak distantly, and the people pass and repass, but she heeds neither. She is recalled to herself at last by the entrance of a man, who first looks in uncertainly, and then comes in joyfully—Scrope.

“ Why, here you are ! ” he cries, cheerfully. “ I have been hunting high and low for you ! I thought you were with Le Mesurier ; this is our dance——Good God ! ” (with an abrupt change of tone) “ what has happened ? ”

His voice brings her back to her right mind—brings the bitter, bitter truth rolling over her soul like a black flood. Paul gone—gone for good !—gone with a look of inexorable displeasure on his face, and she herself has thrown him away.

“ What has happened ? ” she says, in a sharp, harsh voice. “ Do you ask that ? Why, just this, ” (laughing rather wildly)

"I have been amusing myself cutting my own throat. That is what has happened, and I have to thank *you* for it."

He looks at her in unbounded astonishment. Has she gone mad, as her words seem to imply?

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," she answers, speaking more collectedly, "that Paul is gone—he does not like me any longer—he has *done with me!*" (falling unconsciously into his own form of expression).

"WHAT!"

"Don't look *glad!*" she cries, excitedly. "How *dare* you? If you look glad I shall *kill* you!"

"I am not looking glad. What should I look glad for? I don't know what you are talking about."

"You have got your wish," she says, rising and speaking with slow vindictiveness. "You have parted us! It is what

you have been aiming at all along. I hope you are pleased.”

“Do you mean to say that you have been quarrelling about me again?”

“Yes, I do!” she answers, panting, and looking at him always with dilated eyes; “you knew we should. That was why you remained here when I *begged* you to go, when any *gentleman* would have *died* sooner than stay.”

The young man bites his lip till it bleeds; he clenches his hands, convulsively; he writhes under her insults; but he makes no retort.

“Was it because you danced with me?” he asks, quietly, after an interval.

“You know it was,” she answers, petulantly. “Why do you keep worrying me with these questions? He told me not to dance with you, and I said I would; I thought it was fine to have a spirit—you have always told me, all of you, what a fine

spirit I had. Well, God knows" (laughing harshly) "I have been spirited enough to-night!"

A little silence.

"If he had but known," she says, looking scornfully at her companion, "how *small* the sacrifice was that he asked of me, he would not have insisted so much upon it."

Scrope's endurance fails a little.

"You are making mountains of mole-hills," he says, impatiently. "As far as I can understand, you have had a little misunderstanding—I do not see how any one could well live with you without having them—a misunderstanding which you will make up within the first five minutes of your next meeting—that is all."

"It is *not* all!" she answers, persistently. "We have had a hundred such misunderstandings, as you describe—they were always my fault, always—and made

them up again ; but this was different ; when he turned at the door and looked at me, I felt that it was all over with me.” As she speaks, she sinks upon the sofa again ; her arms fall heavily to her side ; the listlessness of despair is expressed in her whole attitude.

“ Fiddlesticks ! ” replies Scrope, brusquely. “ A man throw a girl over to whom he is passionately attached, because she says a few nasty things to him—more especially ” (smiling, a little maliciously) “ when she has rather got into a habit of saying nasty things to everybody ! A very likely tale. No, no ; though you are engaged to Paul, and I am not, I think I know him a little better than you do, still.”

She shakes her head ; his words convey neither conviction nor comfort to her mind.

“ Listen ! ” says the young man, eagerly, sitting down on the sofa beside her. “ Since I came into this room, you have been un-

civiller to me than ever woman was to man before ; once or twice I have felt as if I should like to kill you, or myself, or both ; but you said one true thing—it *is* I that have brought this on you ; and so, I suppose” (rather ruefully), “the least I can do is to try and put things straight again for you ; I will go and look for him—he cannot have gone far ; most likely” (smiling a little derisively) “I shall find him in the supper-room—and I will bring him back to you, see if I don’t.”

“Will you ?” she says, with a bitter smile. “There will be two to that bargain !”

Before she can say more he is gone.

The minutes pass : five, ten ; she sits with her eyes rivetted on the door, saying over to herself : “There is no hope—there is no hope ;” but all the while, hope is there. After a space, which the clock announces to be a quarter of an hour, but

which is marked on the dial-plate of her heart as ten years, Scrope re-enters—alone.

“I could not find him, anywhere,” he says, advancing, with his eyes on the ground; “he has gone. For Heaven’s sake, keep up” (seeing her face change and quiver convulsively). “Don’t look so miserable! It is only the delay of a few hours—it will be all right to-morrow morning.”

“It will *never* be all right again,” she cries, bursting into violent weeping, and throwing her head down on the hard horsehair bolster of the sofa. “Oh, Paul! Paul!”

The sight of her misery sets him beside himself. He flings himself on his knees beside her, catches hold of one of her hands, that is hanging down limp and nerveless, and rashly trusting to her absorption kisses it over and over again.

After all, it is only white kid that gets the benefit of his caresses.

His action rouses her—she sits upright ; the lightning flashes at him from her drowned eyes ; the hot carnation scorches up the tears on her cheeks.

“ How *dare* you ?” she cries wildly, tearing her hand out of his grasp. “ I shall always *hate* my hand for having been kissed by you—*you*, who have brought me to this ! If I did not know that it was useless to ask any favour of you, I would beg you, at least, to relieve me of the sight of you.”

He rises to his feet ; a spasm contracts his angry beautiful face.

“ I’m going, never fear. I begin to agree with you, that I cannot be a gentleman, or I should have gone long ago.” After a pause : “ I have sent for my things from your sister’s house ; I shall go to London by the next train.”

“ Thank God, at least for that,” she says, fiercely. “ The last and only boon I have to ask of you is, that I may never set eyes on you again.”

He bows : “ I promise you that you shall not, *unless you send for me !*”

She laughs insultingly : “ You will wait some time, if you wait for that.”

“ Lenore !” (taking her hand, whether she will or no, while his eyes burn, savage and passionate, into hers), “ you will make some one *murder* you, some day. Good-bye !”





CHAPTER X.

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

“**Q**UITE incomprehensible,” says Sylvia, slightly shaking her head, and turning the tap of the urn on to the recipient teapot.

We are at breakfast; breakfast after a ball is a languid feast: one looks green, one is yawning, one drinks two cups of tea instead of one. From another evil, to which some people are subject, I am free—I never suffer from the cramps that result from over-dancing. Sylvia and I are the only ones that have yet made our

appearance : after all, there are only two more to appear—Paul and Lenore—for Mr. Scrope has gone overnight, or rather this morning, and it is apropos of his departure that Sylvia is, for the fiftieth time, expressing her astonishment, her displeasure, her remorse.

" So ill-bred," she continues, nibbling a piece of toast ; " so unlike him. I have always said what a particularly gentleman-like boy Charlie Scrope was ! Do you know, Jemima, it has struck me once or twice that perhaps he was hurt at my refusing so point-blank to sit out in the corridors with him ? Very unreasonable of him if he was so, for I meant nothing personal to him ; I said the same to them all."

I shake my head with an air of superior information.

" It was not quite such a sudden thought as all that ; earlier in the day he had settled to go."

“And never mentioned it to me?” cries my sister, raising her voice a little, and colouring. “Most extraordinary! Now I come to think of it, Jemima, he has been very odd and *distract* for a week past; several times when I spoke to him, he answered quite *à tort et à travers*, and once or twice he did not answer at all.”

I shrug my shoulders.

“They are all alike; determination of *Lenore* to the brain; when Lenore is in the room they *never* answer me. I am quite used to it; are not you? For the last five years I have walked through life with a gooseberry-bush in my hand.”

“She is very nice-looking, of course,” says Sylvia, in a rather demurring voice, not seeming particularly to relish the being put, by implication, in the same boat with me. “I am sure I am the last person to gainsay that; nobody *can* accuse me of not being willing to admit other people’s good

looks ; but there is no denying that she is on too large a scale to suit some people's tastes : many *men* prefer something more *petite* and *mignonne*.”

“Do they ?” say I, sceptically. “I do not know. It seems to me that most men like a woman that there is a good deal of.”

“I do not think I quite liked the way she did her hair last night,” says Sylvia, taking some honey and looking at it pensively, as it slides in a long string from the spoon ; “too much scratched off her face.”

With what clever stroke of caustic wit or incisive irony I might have parried this thrust will never now be certainly known, for at this moment a footman enters with a note, which he hands to Sylvia. She opens it and reads ; apparently it does not take long to peruse.

“Are *all* the people run mad ?” she cries, in a tone of peevish astonishment, tossing it over to me. I pick it up :—

“DEAR MRS. PRODGERS,—I must apologise to you for leaving your house so suddenly and at so untimely an hour ; but the fact is, I am unavoidably called away. Thank you over and over again for all the kindness and hospitality you have shown me.

“I remain, yours very truly,

“PAUL LE MESURIER.”

“Is Mr. Le Mesurier gone?” cry I to the footman, who is in the act of leaving the room.

“Yes, ’m.”

“What time did he go?”

“About seven, ’m. I heard him telling the driver that he must catch the 7.25 up-train from Norley.”

“I wonder did he and Charlie travel together?” say I, *sotto voce*, tickled, despite myself, by the notion of the rivals boxed up together, within the narrow precincts of

a smoking-carriage, for all the long transit between Norley and London.

“ Did he leave nothing besides this ? ” cries Sylvia, in indignant excitement, holding up the little billet between her finger and thumb ; “ no message—nothing ? ”

“ I believe, ’m, there was a letter for Miss Lenore.”

“ Where is it ?—what has become of it ? Bring it here.”

“ If you please, ’m, I think Nicholls took it up to Miss Lenore an hour ago.”

He retires, inwardly amused, interested, compassionate, no doubt ; outwardly as absolutely indifferent to the joys, the sorrows, the deaths, the marriages, the jiltings, and being-jilteds of his family, as is incumbent on any servant who wishes to keep his situation.

The urn sputters and fizzes ; the pug sits on his haunches, with his bleary eyes rolling, and gives a short suppressed bark, that

means, "Muffin." We stare at one another.

"I thought there was something wrong last night, when Lenore said he had gone home with a headache," say I, with that sort of back-handed prophecy—that "told-you-so" wisdom—for which women are so remarkable.

"So did I," says Sylvia, determined not to be behindhand in sapience.

Again we stare at one another, with our toast dropped from our fingers, and our tea quickly cooling in the frosty morning air.

"I think I will go and see how she is getting on," I say, rising.

"So will I," says Sylvia, rising too.

This is not quite what I wish; but it cannot be helped. As we pass the nursery, the children, hearing our footsteps, shoot out like bombshells, and join us.

By the time we reach Lenore's door we

form a quite considerable *cortège*, both as to noise and numbers.

I knock—no answer. I knock again. “Lenore, may I come in?” Still no answer. I try the handle—it is locked. I announce the fact.

“How very odd!” says Sylvia, rattling the handle in her turn. “Lenore! Lenore! we are all come to see you. Let us in!”

I do not myself think this form of request likely to invite compliance, but whether it is or not, it meets with no better success than its predecessors.

“Do you think she can have got out of the window?” suggests my sister, beginning to look rather tragic.

“Absurd! Why should she?”

Again we knock and rattle, each one in turn, and then all together. No result.

“Suppose you look through the keyhole, *Jemima*?” says Sylvia.

I comply. A keyhole is an unsatisfac-

tory vehicle for exercising sight. At my first glance, I see nothing; at my second, I dimly discern what looks like a rose-coloured heap lying on the hearthrug—Lenore has a rose-coloured dressing-gown.

“She is lying on the hearthrug,” I announce, in a whisper. “Poor soul! I am afraid that she is taking it sadly to heart.”

“Lying on the hearthrug!” repeats Sylvia, turning rather pale, and clutching my arm. “Good heavens! Jemima, I hope she has not—has not—put—put an end to herself?”

“Fiddlesticks!” cry I, angrily. “Why should she? How could she? Swallowed the poker, I suppose, or cut her throat with a small-tooth comb.”

Sylvia applies her eye, in turn, to the keyhole.

“Lenore!” (raising her voice) “why are you lying on the hearthrug? What are you doing? You are frightening us all

out of our wits. Open the door this instant ! ”

We hear a noise inside ; in a moment more the door is flung roughly open, and Lenore confronts us in her dressing-gown—her undressed hair falling in a long, bright brown shower about her face, which is ash-white. Her eyes are red, and her eyelids redder—the first are half and the latter *double* their normal size.

“ What do you want ? ” she says, hoarsely. “ Why are you making this noise ? What has brought you all here ? ”

A daunted silence falls upon us for a moment—then Sylvia speaks :

“ Nothing particular, dear ; we only wanted to know what has made Paul take himself off so suddenly, and we thought you might be able to tell us ? ”

“ I neither know nor care,” she answers, fiercely ; but I see both lips and eyelids twitching.

“Aunty Lenore, how red your nose is!” cries Bobby, with all that delicacy for others’ feelings, that charming reticence, so characteristic of infancy—staring at her the while, with eyes as black and round as the plums in a Christmas pudding. The last straw breaks the camel’s back.

“Had not you better send for the servants and the stablemen, the dogs and the parrot?” cries Lenore, turning savagely to Sylvia. “It is a pity that you should not have every living thing in the house to gape at me.”

“Go downstairs,” say I, pleadingly, “and take the children with you. I will be down directly; perhaps she will let me speak to her myself.”

With many demurrings, both of word and look, Sylvia complies, and retires with her offspring. I follow Lenore into her room, and close the door.

“ Is it true ? ” I say compassionately, taking her hot reluctant hand.

“ Is what true ? ”

“ That he is gone ? ”

“ I really cannot say ; I have not been to look for him,” she answers in a devil-may-care voice, averting her eyes.

“ Lenore ! ” I cry reproachfully, “ what is the good of keeping up this affectation with me ? It is all very well before Sylvia ; but have you forgotten that night at Morlaix, when you were so happy, and when you came and told me all about it ? ”

“ I remember,” she answers, with a hard laugh ; “ and how pleased you were at being waked out of your beauty-sleep, and how kind and complimentary you were about him.”

“ I was not kind,” I answer, rather crestfallen. “ I was sleepy, and very ill-natured, and rather envious ; but I am not

ill-natured now. I would help you, if I knew how; and though you are determined to hide it from me, I know what you are feeling."

"Then you know more than I do myself," replies my sister, quite collectedly. "I give you my word of honour, at the present moment I feel absolutely nothing."

I am not generally short of words, but I can find none now.

"When I first got *that*," she continues, nodding her head towards a note, which lies open on the dressing-table—"you know I had been buoying myself up with hope all night, because he came back here, instead of going straight away—I thought it a good sign—but when I got that I think I must have gone mad for five minutes—do people ever go mad for such a short time?—I found myself down on the hearthrug, beating my head against the

floor. That was wise, was not it ? So likely to bring him back. Jemima ! ” (grasping my arm with her burning hand), “ I am going to tell you a secret ; if I could have found anything to do it with, I should have tried to put an end to myself. I should have done it in a bungling, journeyman way, and very likely, when I got into the other world, I should have been sorry that I had not staid here ; still, I should have tried ; but you see ” (laughing) “ it is difficult for the best-intentioned person to commit suicide with a cake of Windsor soap or a back-hair glass ! ”

“ Lenore ! ” I cry angrily, “ you frighten me ! Why do not you cry ? Why do you laugh ? I wish you would not look so odd ! ”

“ Do I look odd ? ” she says, rising and going over to the long *cheval* glass. “ Well—yes ! ” (making a derisive bow to her own swollen disfigured image) “ a

charming-looking person!—the belle of the ball! I always told Paul” (a sharp contraction of the muscles of her face as she speaks his name) “that I looked nothing without my plaits.”

I stand stupidly staring at her, with my hands clasped.

“If you want to ask any questions, *now* is your time,” she continues, calmly; “it will be back on me just now—rushing, tearing back; but for the moment I feel as little as you do, or, if possible less; I say over ‘Paul is gone!’ and then ‘Charlie is gone!’ and the one fact seems as little afflicting as the other.”

“Lenore, are you speaking truth?” I cry, incredulously. “You look as if you were! Tell me, if you are sure you can bear to do it, how was it? You know I am quite in the dark—how did it come about?”

“Incompatibility of opinion about Mr.

Scrope,” she answers with a forced laugh ; then sinking down on the floor, hiding her face in the folds of my gown like a child. “ I do not think I *will* tell you, after all ! ” she says, moaning ; “ when one’s ship has gone down, what is the good of going into the details of the wreck ? ” At the last word she breaks into tumultuous weeping.

“ Perhaps it has not gone down,” say I, eagerly. “ Who knows ? Let me see the note. May I ? ” (stretching out my hand to take it).

“ If you like ” (then laughing again painfully between her sobs) ; “ it is not so affectionate that one need be ashamed of showing it.”

I pick it up eagerly. It is not very tidily written — scratchily rather, and shakily—several of the little words are left out :—

“ December 28th, 5½ A.M.

“ I would not have come back here last night, if I could have helped it, but it was unavoidable. I shall, at least, not intrude upon your sight again, as I shall be gone hours before you are up. I will send back your letters in a day or two; also, if you *insist* upon it, your photographs. Do not send back *anything* of mine—it is the last favour I ask of you.—P. LE M.”

I touch Lenore's heaving shoulder. “ Look up !” I say, cheerfully. “ I am in better spirits. There is hope !”

She lifts her heavy head. “ Hope of what ?”

Poor soul ! The tears are running flat races down her cheeks, coursing down her nose, and making hot wet spots on the breast of her smart rose dressing-gown.

“ He is angry,” I say, smiling ; “ there is always hope when a man is angry.”

She does not answer in words, but she draws herself up into a kneeling posture, and clutches my arm with painful tightness, while a little red creeps into her cheeks ; there is already plenty in her nose and eyes. With her loose streaming hair, and upward wet eyes, she looks a Magdalen all over. The old painters, if you remark, have a knack of making their Magdalens' noses a little red.

“ If you wish it, and are willing to take him on his own terms, I believe you may get him back.”

Still she says nothing ; only the clasp on my arm tightens, till I wriggle uncomfortably under it.

“ You must, of course, write at once,” I say, in a matter-of-fact voice ; “ and tell him that you are sorry, and that you will not do *it*—whatever *it* was—again.”

“ *Say I am sorry !*” cries Lenore, starting to her feet ; “ eat dirt, and go, like a

whipped child, with its finger in its mouth, and say, 'I'll be good!' *Not if I know it!*"

She no longer looks like a Magdalen, or, if she does, it is a very restive one.

"Very well," say I, coolly; "if you prefer your pride to your lover, of course it is a matter of taste which is best worth keeping. I have no more to say."

No answer.

"I see," continue I, with affected enthusiasm, "you are conscious that you were in the right, and that he was so completely in the wrong that the first advance *must* come from him. I understand, of course! I respect you."

"Do not," cries Lenore, gruffly. "I was not in the right—am I ever? But the knowing that one is in the wrong does not make it any the easier to say it."

"There are so many ways of implying a thing without exactly saying it."

Silence.

" My dear child," I say, stretching out my hand to take one of hers, which is twisting and turning its fellow about ; " the question is, how can you live best : with your dignity and without Paul, or with Paul and without your dignity ?"

She falls on her knees beside me again ; she buries her face in my lap.

" Jemima, never tell anybody, and, if you are asked, say that it is not so ; and never remind me, when you get angry, that I have said it : but—but" (very indistinctly) " I would eat all the dirt that ever was in all the world to get him back again — there !" (looking up and colouring violently). " Was there ever a case on record of anybody having said anything so mean ?"

I shrug my shoulders. " What does it matter about being mean, so as one is happy ?" say I, with a philosophy of

doubtful morality if carried out to its final consequences. "Write, *write*, WRITE; and, if possible" (picking up the note again and laughing), "write with a better pen than he did, Lenore" (examining it more narrowly). "I do believe he *cried* over it. Look! what a suspicious blot over the 'P.'!"

"Only a sputtering pen or bad blotting-paper," replies Lenore. But she is laughing too, and there is an alertness in her gait as she walks across the room in strong contrast to the heavy droop of her attitude five minutes ago. "Jemima" (her poor red eyes sparkling again, and a tender tremor about the quivering corners of her mouth), "I will write. God knows what will come of it, or how I shall bear the waiting for the answer; but—I will write."

"Do," say I; and then I draw an arm-chair to the fire, and Lenore sits down to

the writing-table. The opening sentences seem to be hatched with difficulty, but after them her pen runs glibly enough : it is going to be a longer letter than his. “ Lenore,” say I, presently, turning my head round, and speaking diffidently, “ I think that, on the supposition that this may not bring him back—a most improbable one, but still possible—I—I (do not be angry)—I would not make it *too* affectionate.” She flushes scarlet, reads it hastily over, then tears it into a thousand bits, and, running over to the fire, tosses the fragments in. “ Nor too cold,” I subjoin, rather startled at the effect of my caution. “ Do not you understand ? ” I continue, eagerly. “ The kind of letter you should write is one that, if he is so disposed, will bring him back again ; and that, if he is *not* so disposed, will not make you hot to think of having sent it.”

To compose such a letter as I have thus described seems a hard task. The hearth is strewn with little shreds of paper before one, that hits the golden mean between the fond and the frigid, is written fairly out without blots or erasures.

“Will you read it?” asks my sister, holding it out rather reluctantly to me, when it is at length finished. “I think I had rather you did not, but you may, if you wish.”

I shake my head, and swallow down my curiosity: “Why should I? It is between you and him; what has a third person to do with it?”

She turns away relieved, folds it up, directs it, and fastens the envelope. “Jemima,” she says, clasping my arms with her two hot slender hands, while her great solemn eyes fix themselves, feverish and miserably excited, on mine, “the responsibility of this lies with you. I do not

know whether it is affectionate or not ; I cannot judge—I hardly know what is in it ; but if it fail, the shame of it will *kill* me.”





CHAPTER XI.

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

AT the lowest calculation there must be forty-eight hours between the sending of any letter by post and the receiving of the answer. In most cases sixteen or eighteen of these hours are slidden over in sleep ; but in a great anxiety who *can* sleep ? In heavy grief one *may* sleep—probably one will ; when hope has stolen out of sight, and despair sits by us with veiled head, then one sleeps most deeply. Sometimes, in slumber, God gives us back our dead : him that but yes-

terday we coldly kissed in his strait shroud, we see coming towards us with life-coloured lips and open eyes: the dead never come back to us *dead*: always they are alive — talking, smiling, occupied in some commonplace employment, making some foolish tender jest. But sleep refuses to come to the troubled, who have yet an uneasy hope: she will not be made use of merely as a bridge over obnoxious hours: she will be loved and wooed for herself, or else she will stand relentlessly apart. I think that there are very few of the thousands of minutes that constitute those forty-eight hours that do not find Lenore consciously, broadly wakeful. She refuses all proposals that tend to divert her thoughts by exercise or employment: she will not walk—she will not drive; she will not even come downstairs. All day long she sits in the window-seat in her room—sits there, with drooped figure and carelessly dressed

hair : her eyes fixed alternately on the brown winter outside, or the avenue by which all carriages and all foot-passengers must approach the house, and on the watch which lies on the table before her ; as if by looking, looking, she could make the slow hands pass more swiftly over the dial-plate. Oh, unwise Lenore ! to wish to hurry the feet of the swift minutes ! They may seem unsweet, nay most bitter, according to our present gauge of sweet and sour ; but oh ! are they worse—are they worse than the deep timeless grave, and the leaden-coloured shores of Eternity, towards which, in their flitting, they carry us ? Once, coming in suddenly, I find her with all Paul's letters strewn round her : she is reading them all through in order—from the first seasick note he wrote her from Jersey on his homeward journey, to the three scrawling, galloping lines which, less than a week ago, announced the train and

the hour which were to bring him back to her. I think, poor soul ! she is trying to extract more love than is in them, from the loving phrases that fill them. The short winter day treads heavily past to his rest, and the night comes—the winter night in its dull endlessness—then the dim, late morning light. Lenore makes no complaint, and cuts me short when I begin inquiries ; but I *know* she has not slept. The postman comes and goes without any special interest attaching to him : it is impossible that he can bring anything yet.

Another day walks past with lagging feet. Lenore will not move, will not eat : all her life seems to have passed into the eyes which *grow* to the face of the watch that ticks ever before her. She has turned Paul's picture, which hangs opposite her bed, to the wall ; when I ask her why she has done it, she answers that, unless

he is hers, she has no business to look at him.

The second slow day dies : its life is so faint and dark that there is but little difference between it and its death. Sylvia and I dine *tête-à-tête*, and get over our dinner with a surprising and feminine celerity. It is astonishing how the presence of even one man prolongs the duration of dinner : is it from the comparative immensity of man's appetite, or from the stimulus and gentle fillip that his company gives to conversation ? We yawn through the evening, and at ten retire to such warm depths of silky sleep as one experiences only in frosty weather.

It is rarely indeed that others' griefs keep one awake. Our letters arrive mostly at half-past seven : it is some time before that hour, and in my curtained and shuttered room absolute darkness still reigns, when I drowsily hear a footstep passing along the

corridor outside my door. From some half-conscious, half-dreamful impulse, I jump up and run to the door, open it, and look out into the black chilliness outside.

“ Lenore, is that you ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Where are you going ?” (my teeth chattering so as to make me almost entirely unintelligible).

“ What is that to you ?” Tired of her incivilities, sleepy and shivering, I prepare to shut the door in a huff. “ I am going to see whether the postman is *dead*, that he is so long in coming,” she says, in a quick excited voice.

“ It is not nearly time for him !—it is the middle of the night !”

“ It *must* be time for him,” she says, petulantly ; “ it must be *three years* since he was here last !”

“ You will be frozen,” I say, laying my hand, in the dark, on the thin shawl that

covers her shoulders ; “ have my sealskin !” She does not heed me.

“ *Jemima !*” (I cannot see her face, but I hear the quick sobbing breaths with which she speaks)—“ if it does not come to-day, my reason will tell me that it is because he is not at home, and that it has had to be forwarded to him ; but all the same—reason, or no reason—if it does not come, I shall *go mad !*”

Before I can reply, she is gone. I shiver back into bed : I find it as deeply, downily warm as I left it ; but the delicious langour, the semi-unconsciousness, fast melting into total unconsciousness, that such warmth and softness woo, declines to come again. I find myself, with my head raised every minute from the pillow, listening for that back-coming footfall. It seems a long time coming ; perhaps it is only half an hour really: at last I hear it—I spring to the door.

“ Well ?”

A grey figure runs past me, with its head bent, but answers nothing. I snatch up a dressing-gown, and run, *ventre à terre*, after it, half-afraid of finding the door locked, when I reach my sister's room. It is not—it is ajar ; I enter. The sick dwarf light creeps in by the latticed window-panes; the dead fire's ashes lie whitely grey upon the hearth ; the table is grey, the chairs are grey, and on one of them a grey figure lies still and stiff, with grey hands covering its face.

“ What is it ?—what is it ?” I cry, horribly excited, running up to her. She drops her hands into her lap ; in the dim light I see her great shining eyes, brimming over with anger and despair, flame into mine.

“ It is all your fault !” she says, hoarsely ; “ *you* did it ! I have lain down in the gutter, and he has walked over me, and it is *your* doing !”

“ *What !*”

“ If you had left me alone, if you had not meddled—you were always a meddler, always—I might have gone through my life, hating myself, knowing that I had been my own death, finding no taste in anything ; but at least I should not have had to get red whenever I thought of myself—at least I should not have made overtures that have been declined. I should not have asked a man to marry me, and been politely, but firmly, *rejected*——Good God!” (breaking off suddenly, and clenching her hands above her head)—“ it cannot be *me* that this has happened to—it *must* be somebody else. I that always held my head so high !”

“ What are you talking about ?” I stammer ; “ he cannot—he has not——”

“ Has not he ?” she answers, bitterly. “ There !—read ! Can you see ?” (walking over to the curtain and pulling it back), “ —— ‘ *My dear Miss Herrick !* When I

got as far as that I knew it was all over with me! His ‘dear Miss Herrick!’ ‘My dear Miss Herrick!’—‘my dear Mr. Le Mesurier!’ Oh, my God!” She throws herself on the floor, and buries her face in the carpet, while her hands dig themselves into it, like those of a man in the death-agony. After all, why should the soul’s death be accompanied with throes less bitter than the body’s?

“How can I read it?” I cry, impatiently, “you are holding it!” and, indeed, as she lies prostrate on the floor, it is crumpled up in one of her clenched hands. She raises herself, and straightens out the creased paper.

“Look!” she says, striking it with her forefinger. “See how straight the lines run—how firmly the letters are formed—it might be a thesis instead of a death-warrant! Do you see any blots *here*?—do you think he cried over *this*?”

“ Give it me !” I say, eagerly stretching out my hand ; “ let me see it !”

“ *Never !*” she answers, tearing it sharply across, and then again across, and then again ; “ it is between him and me—the last thing that ever will be !”

I kneel down beside her in silence in the cold grey dawn, and put my arm round her.

“ Be satisfied with knowing the upshot !” she says, with a dreary smile. “ He says it very kindly, very prettily, in a very good bold hand, and he takes six pages to say it in ; but, all the same, the drift is, ‘ I have had enough of you ! ’ ”

“ Is it possible ?” I exclaim, with a gasp, and a bitter sense of regret at my share in the business.

“ It was not his *real* reason for leaving me,” says Lenore, sitting on the floor, and rambling on to herself, half under her breath. “ It was only a blind—how dull of

me to be taken in !—a pretext for getting back to *her*. Yes, I understand—I understand. I suppose I do get wearisome after a time—but ” (with a long low moan), “ it was such a little, *little* time ! ”

A pause.

“ She made good use of those six months, did not she ?—did not cry at him, and throw herself at his head, as I did ; but stole up to him, modestly, with her eyes down, so that he did not find it out—she always *was* his *beau idéal* of feminine excellence—yes, yes——” (running dreamily over in her mind his long-past phrases) “ ‘ eyes like a shot partridge ’—‘ not at all clever ’—‘ does not say much ’—‘ very loving.’—Yes ! his *beau idéal* ! meek, dowdy, mealy-mouthed ! He would have kept to her always, if I had let him alone. I am glad I didn’t. I had my day !—I had my day ! ”

Her hands embrace her knees ; she be-

gins to rock gently backwards and forwards.

“Stole him away! bit by bit—bit by bit!” she continues, sighing softly. “Jemima!” (her tone altering, and her eyes glittering with a passion of despairing jealousy), “that cousin is a sweet woman—I know she is—charitable as Dorcas—patient as Griselda—she will help him in everything good, and hinder him in everything ill. If I thought she was a bad woman, and that he would repent it, I could bear it better! Oh, my God! he will never be punished!—men never are! Every day of his life he will be gladder and gladder that he is rid of me—he will tell her so—while I—while I——” She raises her voice wildly at the last words.

“Stop!” I cry, angry and frightened. “Don’t look so odd! For God’s sake, see him as he is—look at him as other people

do—a man your inferior in every respect, and who never really loved you!”

No sooner are the words out of my mouth, than I see that I have been guilty of one of my many breaches of tact.

“How *dare* you say that?” she cries, griping my arm. “If you wish to say such things, say them to some one else!—do not *venture* to say them to me! If you are going to tell such cruel lies, leave my room this instant!—*Never really loved me!* Much you know about it—you whom nobody ever loved! Do you think *I* could have been mistaken!—I, who was with him all day—who watched his face every minute? He *did* love me! he *did!* he DID! Not blindly, not foolishly: he saw—he could not help seeing—that every second thing I did, every second word I said, was wrong and unladylike; but he was making me better—every day he was making me better! If he had married me I should

have been a good woman, and he would have taken me to heaven with him !”

“ I am not so sure that he is going there himself !” I say, spitefully.

“ Say that you did not mean it—say that you do not think it *really* !” continues my sister, with an anguish of entreaty in her tone, and in the haggard loveliness of her face. “ You know ” (with a wild smile), “ he has taken away the present and the future ! If you take away the past, too—if you take away that day at Huelgoat—that day—that day ” (wandering off into memory again) “ when I knelt on the cushion of little marsh-flowers by the brook, and the children went by to pick bilberries : if you take away *that* day, and the days at Morlaix, and the day when we stood by Châteaubriand’s tomb, and saw the waves and the sea-mews below us, and planned how we should walk on through life, and to heaven together—if you take *them* away

from me, what is there left me but to curse God and die ? ”

I shudder, and cry, “ Hush—hush ! ” but she pays no attention to me.

“ She might as well have left him to me,” she continues presently, pushing Paul’s betrothal ring absently up and down her finger ; “ she could have done so well without him ! She is a good religious woman, and has another happy world to look forward to, while I—I have only this. You see, Jemima, it is only we wicked people that *can* lose all at one blow.”

“ My child !—my child ! ” I cry, snatching her two hands ; “ what are you talking about ? I do not want to preach to you, and you would not listen to me if I did, but you frighten me ! it is like *daring* God to do worse to you. How *can* you have lost all as long as you are still within the bounds of His great clemency—as long as you are still outside Hell’s gates ? ”

"*Am I?*" she says, with a flickering haggard smile; "are you so sure of that? As I came along the meadows this morning, I have an idea that I had a good notion how they feel down below. Bah!" (jumping up, and walking to the window) "do not look so scared! not sleeping and not eating makes one light-headed. I am getting quite rantipole. Get me something to drink—cognac—sal-volatile—it does not matter what, so as it is strong!"

I hurry back to my own room, pour some sal-volatile and water into a glass, and return with it to her. I find her lying languidly back in an armchair, pale and worn-out, but with open eyes and a set stony face. She drinks eagerly, and then gives a long low sigh.

"Poor soul!—poor soul!" I say pitifully, stroking her loose tossed hair. "I daresay you think it is easy enough to bear other people's troubles, and as you said just now,

since I never was loved myself, I cannot enter into your feelings ; but still, do you know, Lenore, I think no one can well be sorrier for you than I am ?”

“ Really !” (with an air of most weary indifference).

“ Lenore, you are not a weak woman—I know that ; don’t let him have the satisfaction of thinking that you take it to heart ! Show him what stuff you are made of, by bearing it bravely !”

“ Make an effort, in fact, like Mrs. Dombey,” says my sister, smiling sarcastically ; “ or rather *unlike* Mrs. Dombey. Never fear ! Have you lived with me nineteen years, and have you yet to learn that I am not the sort of woman to go about with my pocket-handkerchief to my eyes, whimpering because I have been *jilted* ?—yes, let us call things by their right names—*jilted* !” As she speaks, a deep carnation flush of shame spreads over her

white cheeks. "Go now," she says imperatively ; "leave me ! There, you need not look towards the windows as if you thought I was going to throw myself out of one of them—see, they are all bolted—and I would not make such a clumsy ending for the world."

I move, unwilling and slow, towards the door. She calls after me :

"Jemima, if ever you tell anyone how you have seen me, and what things you have heard from me during the last forty-eight hours, I shall kill you. Let them think I have had influenza—mumps—any disease you choose ; but let no one ever guess that I have been pining three whole days for *love*. Bah ! it makes me laugh to think of it !"

"Are you *sure* I can do nothing for you ?" I ask, staring uncomfortably at her forlorn wild face.

"Certain !" she answers, emphatically.

“ I must fight it out by myself ; it is a case where neither man, woman, nor child can help me !”

“ If neither man, woman, nor child can help you,” I say, hesitatingly, yet eagerly, “ why not go to *God* ?”

She shrugs her shoulders : “ It is a sort of trouble that God would not care about !”

“ What are you saying ?” I cry. “ Is God, like a man, *capricious* in His pity ?”

“ I think so,” she answers, listlessly ; “ at least, I know He does not pity me.”

I am too shocked to make any rejoinder.

“ I have set up an idol in the place of God,” she says, gravely. “ Can I expect God to be sorry because it is knocked down ? There—go ! You are a good woman in your way, and I rather like you, but you’ll never make your fortune as a preacher !”

Sadly I obey her. During the long

weary day I go about heartsore and anxious. I do not go near her room myself, nor do I allow any one else to do so ; but my heart is gnawed by a painful curiosity, to know what terrible death-fight of the soul is raging within those quiet walls.

As Sylvia and I sit moping and flat by the drawing-room fire before dinner, what is my surprise to see the door open and admit Lenore, who enters with a brisk step and a matter-of-fact air !

“Good morning, Sylvia ; rather late in the day to say ‘good morning’—is not it ? I have registered a vow never to go to a ball again ; it has taken me three whole days to recover from that last one !”

She says it rather as if it were a lesson learnt by rote, but she looks alert and upright ; her cheeks are coloured with pink, and her eyes are neither lacklustre nor wet.

"Aunty Lenore!" cries Bobby, who has been raging round the room with a luckless kitten (mewing with pain and exasperation, and with all its claws out) clutched round the neck with strangling tightness in his cruel little arms. He drops the kitten, which instantly makes off with its tail straight up. "Aunty Lenore!" rushing at her, and boisterously embracing her knees, to the injury of her crisp muslin dress: then, with a sudden and ingenious connection of ideas, "Where is Uncle Paul?"

With a sudden impulse she pushes the child violently away. I see her face writhe, and the pupils of her eyes darken and flash; but in an instant, controlling herself, she speaks calmly:

"He is gone! He is not 'Uncle Paul' any longer—and—and—don't bother about him!"

As we pass through the hall to dinner, I see a letter, in Lenore's handwriting, lying

on the hall-table. I glance inquisitively at it ; it is addressed to—

“CHARLES SCROPE, ESQ.,

“Limmer’s Hotel.”





CHAPTER XII.

WHAT JEMIMA SAYS.

IF I imagine that Lenore's composed cheerfulness and equable serenity are the result of a strain so strong, as to be unable to be kept up beyond one evening, I am mistaken. I find her the same the next morning, and the morning after that, and the morning after *that*. She talks more than usual: ordinarily indeed, she is too lazy to take the trouble of talking merely for the sake of contributing her share to the general stock that forms family conversation, but

now she talks resolutely to any one who will talk to her. She lounges away less time than usual in her own room ; always she is to be seen in the general sitting-rooms, by all comers and goers, working and reading tranquilly. She drives out with Sylvia to pay morning calls ; she walks out with me into the village, carrying broth and jelly. Sometimes I try to surprise her face *off guard*, to see her features fall into the haggard lines of hopeless angry grief in which I saw them so lately ; but I fail ; her face seems to be never in dishabille. She actually *plays with the children* !—gambols which, I confess, remind me of the millennium, when, we are told, the weaned child shall play on the cockatrice's den. On the third day, I am sitting pondering these things in the drawing-room, which Lenore has just left with a light and buoyant tread. Sylvia, with one of her spasmodic fits of mater-

nity upon her, is trying, with alternate peevish coaxings and caressing abuse, to lead, or rather push, pull, and mildly flagellate her offspring along the rosy path of learning. In this case, it is theological learning, as represented by the 'Peep of Day.' Bobby is leaning against her knee, while in the corner—why such peculiar ignominy should attach to the corners of a room tradition saith not—stands Tommy, committing to memory these soothing lines—

"Now if I fight
And scratch and bite,
In passions fall
And bad names call,
Full well I know
Where I shall go."

Now and again, as the thought of the gloomy regions whither his iniquities are hurrying him comes home to his mind, he blubbers suppressedly. What amplest en-

largement on the horrors of hell could equal that portentous hint?—

“ Full well I know
Where I shall go !”

Sylvia to Bobby : “ Has God been kind to dogs ?”

Bobby to Sylvia, doubtfully : “ Ye—es.”

His round eyes are fixed on Toby the pug, basking in the fire warmth, and chasing the lively flea through the preserves of his soft fawn hind-quarters, and his mind is wandering from the typical dog of the fable to the *actual* dog of real life.

“ Is the dog’s body like yours ?”

Bobby (thinking it safe to stick to the affirmative) : “ Yes.”

“ *The dog’s body like yours !* What are you thinking of, child ? Are *you* covered all over with black hair, and have you got a big bushy tail ?”

Bobby glances down uncertainly at his

small person, but seeing no caudal appendage, shakes his head.

"Are the chicken's legs like yours?"

Silence.

Mrs. Prodgers is reduced to answering herself from the enlightened page before her: "No, the chicken has very thin dark legs."

Bobby does not appear sufficiently impressed with gratitude for the essential difference between his own fat chubby supporters and those of the benighted chicken. He is still watching Toby, who has abandoned the flea chase, and runs barking towards the door.

"Mother, dear, there is a ring at the door bell."

Prospect of emancipation, and consequent elation of tone.

"Nonsense, darling; attend to your lesson. Has the pig a——"

Whether the next word was soul or tail, gizzard or imagination, transpires not.

“ But there was, *really*, mother. I hear Morris going to open the hall door.”

Mrs. Prodgers listens. “ So there is !”

She jumps up hastily, while the ‘ Peep of Day,’ with all its mingled treasures of piety and natural history, rolls unregarded on the floor, as she stands before the pier-glass, tweaking the black ribbon bow that ornaments her head, and smoothing away the hair behind her ears. By the time the butler’s solid footstep is heard nearing the room she is *à quatre épingles*. The door opens ; “ Mr. Scrope.” My mouth opens too ; my jaw falls. The stocking I am knitting tumbles into my lap.

“ *Charlie !*” cries Sylvia, with a little scream, half real, half affected, of surprise, running forward, with her hands clasped.

Mr. Scrope enters, looking rather sheepish and somewhat disheveled. There

are black marks under his eyes ; his yellow curls are tossed and dim ; he looks unslept and night-travelled.

“ You did not expect to see me, did you ? ” he says, with a rather embarrassed laugh. “ Thought you had got me clear off—that you were rid of me at last ? But you see I have turned up again, like a bad sixpence.”

“ It *is* a surprise, of course,” answers Sylvia, looking modestly down, and fondling Bobby ; “ but—but *quite* a pleasant one. We were getting to hate each other, as only two sisters *tête à tête* can ; were not we, Jemima ? ”

His face falls.

“ *Two* sisters ? ”

Nobody explains ; I, from malice, Sylvia from pre-occupation.

“ The fact is,” continues Scrope, seeing that some explanation is looked for from him, “ that I—that I thought—in fact, I

found that I could get away for a day or two, so I thought I would run down and look you all up."

"Why did not you telegraph? Why not write? I would have sent to meet you," asks Sylvia, raising her bashful eyes. "What scatterbrained things men are!"

He does not heed her; his eyes are wandering round the room.

"Are you looking for Lenore?" I ask, in a matter-of-fact voice. "She is in the library, writing letters. I will tell her you are here."

"Do not," he cries, eagerly, almost pushing me back into my chair. "I will not give you the trouble; I will go and find her myself."

"How *very* extraordinary!" says Sylvia, as the door closes upon him, smiling consciously, and leaning her elbow on the mantelpiece. "What *can* have brought

him back ? I have not the least idea ; have you, Jemima ? Poor, dear old boy, how pale he looked ! I was *so* glad you were in the room. By-the-by, did I get very red ? I felt as if I were turning all the colours of the rainbow.”

“ I do not know ; I dare say.”

“ *Be sure you do not leave me alone in the room with him,*” she continues volubly. “ I shall always keep the children with me ; there are no better chaperones in the world than children.”





CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE AUTHOR SAYS.

AS the young man opens the library door a rush of cold air meets him ; it is a bitter frost, black and pinching, yet one of the wide sash windows is thrown high up, and she whom he seeks is leaning out into the hard dull air. Her elbows rest on the sill ; her dark, winter dress hangs in heavy, close folds about her, and her bright blonde head leans languidly against the window frame. The blotting-book is unopened, nor is any pen dipped in the ink. Lenore's correspondence will

keep, apparently. Hearing the noise he makes in entering she raises herself quickly, as one ashamed of her listless attitude, and they stand face to face.

“You sent for me,” says Scrope—abruptly, without any preliminary handshakings, or “How do you do?”—“and I am come.”

She nods familiarly to him, and smiles a little. “I knew you would.”

“I was not in London; your letter followed me to the South of Ireland—the instant I got it I set off—I have been travelling night and day ever since. More fool I, you will say probably.”

Again she smiles, coldly and sweetly.

“Since *you* have said it, *I* need not.”

“And now that I am here,” he says, brusquely, “what do you want with me? Tell me quickly.”

Instead of complying, she turns her head round again, and looks out at the frosty

black trees, while her fingers play little tunes on the sill.

“Tell me,” he says, coming nearer to her, and breathing quick and hard. “What? You will not speak? I know you—you would keep me on the rack a year, if you could. Why did you write and say, ‘Come back.’ It was for no good, I’ll be sworn, or it would not be you who did it, whatever it was. Speak out, and put me out of my misery.”

Then she speaks, but her words, at first sight, seem to have but small connection with his questions :

“Have you been in the drawing-room?” she asks, while the cold wind blows in on her cheek, and puts no additional colour into it. “Have you heard Bobby say his hymn?—such a pretty one! Yes” (putting her finger on her forehead) “this is it :—

‘Now if I fight
And scratch and bite,

In passions fall
And bad names call,
Full well I know
Where I shall go.’

Does not it describe *me* exactly? I laughed so immoderately that Sylvia said I was irreverent, and I had to leave the room.” She throws herself into an arm-chair, and begins to laugh violently.

“What are you talking about?” he says, looking at her in half scared amazement; “are you mad?” She stops laughing.

“Last time we met,” she says, gravely, “at the ball, don’t you know?—*how* I hate balls!—I have an idea that *I* fought and scratched and bit; at least I know I

“‘In passions fell
And bad names called—’

I called you a great many ugly names, and you did not like it; you were very angry. Well, I have sent for you all this way, just to say that—that—I am sorry.”

“ *What !*” cries the young man, breaking into ungovernable fury, “ is this the fool’s errand you have sent for me on ?—to laugh in my face, and quote an idiotic nursery rhyme to me ? By God, Lenore, it is too bad ! For the last seven—eight months I have been your butt, a football for you to kick about ; but I tell you I am sick of the part. I throw it up ; Find some one else to take it, if you can.”

He turns toward the door ; his broad chest is heaving ; his strong hands are clenched ; his deep blue eyes flash and darken with uncontrolled anger—a passion much more becoming to men’s hard faces than soft and sawny love.

“ Stay !” she cries, rising hastily, and putting her back against the door to prevent his egress ; “ sit down, and, whatever you say, speak lower, for I have no special desire to be overheard. I *had* another

reason for sending for you ; but—but—I am *ashamed* to tell it you.”

“What is it ?”

Big, upstanding, and exasperated, he does not look a man to be trifled with ; but, after all, a man *may not* knock a woman down, so she may shoot all her little arrows at him with a smile and a quiet mind, and fear nothing. Her eyes drop to the carpet at her feet, and a colour burns like fire on her cheeks.

“I sent for you to—to—to—ask you to *marry* me.”

At the last words she raises her eyes, and looks him in the face. A deep and utter silence. He has staggered back against the wall, and is staring at her with wide disbelieving eyes of utter astonishment.

“I have no reason for supposing that you wish to marry me,” she says collectedly, though her face is scarlet. “You never

told me so ; it is only an instinct—an instinct that perhaps has led me astray.” Still complete silence. “ It is not leap-year, is it ? ” she says, with a forced laugh. “ No ! Well, then, I have no excuse—none, except that I wished it ; and you know, from a child, I have always asked for what I wished ; and always—no, not *always*—not *always*,” (stifling a sigh) “ but *generally* I have got it.”

“ And—and Le Mesurier ? ” says Scrope, at last, in a rough and altered voice, trying to stand steadily on his feet, while his knees shake under him, and the room whirls round him.

“ What about him ? ” she cries sharply. “ Why do you drag *him* in ? If it was *anybody’s* part to mention him it was mine. You will hear no more of him ; he is gone—it is all off, you know that ; it was all off before you left—only, I suppose, it gives you pleasure to hear it again.”

“And *you ?*” says the young man, staring into her calm face, while he stammers and stutters ; “you—you—do not care ; you—you are not cut up about it ?”

She turns her face suddenly aside, but only for an instant ; in a moment she is looking at him again—looking at him, and smiling.

“*Cut up !*” she says, laughing. “What an expression ! It is only men that are *cut up* ! Do I look very down-hearted ? Do you see any willow in my hand ? No, no ! I am not the sort of person that is ever *cut up* much about anything.”

Still he looks at her with a bewildered face, paled and quivering, as one but freshly waked from a heavenly dream, that knows not whether he yet sleeps or wakes ; afraid to grasp within his hand the immense and utter bliss that her words seem to set within his reach, lest it should melt away like fairy gold. His emotion does not com-

municate itself to her ; rather, it makes her more composed.

“ Well,” she says, with a pretty chilly mocking smile, “ you have not yet answered me. How cruel to keep me in suspense ! Does it require so much time to decide ? The matter lies in a nutshell. Do you wish to marry me, or do you not ? ”

“ Do I wish to go to ‘ heaven ? Did Dives in hell wish for that cup of cold water ? ” cries the young man, passionately, waking with a leap out of his trance, and flinging his happy arms around her.

She shudders, and pulls herself away.

“ Bah ! ” she says coldly, retreating several paces from him ; “ do not let us have any flowers of rhetoric ; and it is too early days to be affectionate. If Dives had got his cup of cold water he would have taken it quietly, like a gentleman, and not *snatched* it.”

“ You were *not* in earnest, then ? ” cries

the young man, fiercely, with a revulsion of feeling as bitter as his former triumph had been heavenly sweet. “I was a fool to be taken in ! It was only an unfeeling, unwomanly joke. Will you be kind enough” (coming close to her and breathing heavily) “to tell me where the wit is—where the point ?—for upon my soul I do not see it.”

“There is no wit—there is no point,” she answers, with perfect gravity and unflinching seriousness. “What wit or point need there be in naked truth ? As I stand here” (clasping her hands, and looking full into the fierce beauty of his face,) “I am in earnest. I *wish* you to marry me. I *ask* you ! It is unmaidenly—immodest of me—I know that, and so do you, but—I *ask* you !”

“God above !” he says, in a whisper of intense excitement ; “is it possible, Lenore ?” (catching her roughly by the hand).

“ Turn your face to the light ; let me see your eyes—I do not believe your *words* ; it seems so unnatural to hear any kind ones from your lips. God ! when I think that it is less than a week ago that I saw you standing here together, and you giving him such soft kind looks, to get one of which I would have sacrificed twenty years of my life, and thought it a cheap bargain—*you*, whomever threw me anything but mocks and jeers and ugly names—I *cannot* believe it. Say what you will to me—swear it, asseverate it—I cannot, I cannot !”

She does not answer : for the moment, I think, she finds speech difficult ; she stands rigidly still ; her face turned towards the bitter winter landscape, with lips tightly compressed, as one resolved *not* to weep.

“ When I think,” continues the young man vehemently, “ of how you smiled—of how happy you looked if he only touched

in passing the border of your gown, less than a week ago—less than a week ago—can I believe that such love has all gone? *Gone?* Where can it have gone to? Tell me that! Does love disappear like a morning mist?”

“ Hush !” she says, hoarsely, putting her fingers in her ears. “ How many times must I tell you not to drag *him* in? If I ever cared for him ” (she stops, for a second, unable to manage her voice), “ if I ever cared for him, that was between him and me ; *you* had no concern in it ; but now it is all over, *dead* ; and when things are dead what is there to do but to bury and forget them ? Take me or leave me, as you choose, that is your business—I know which you would do if you were wise—but for God’s sake leave that old story alone. It is *my* old story, not *yours*, and I—I have a short memory,” smiling faintly, “ I am fast forgetting it.”

“But *are* you,” he cries, with a painful scepticism, hardly to be wondered at, “are you *sure* of that? Are you sure that if you saw him coming in *now, this minute*, at that door, you would not run to him—as you ran out into the cold to meet him that first night he came—and leave me to cut the brilliant figure I have always done, ever since the unlucky day at Guingamp, where I first saw you?”

At his words she shivers again, and shrinks, as if touched by a hot iron. “What are you talking about?” she cries, passionately. “Why do you persist in indulging in these idiotic suppositions? He will *not* come back, I tell you. Do dead people ever push up their coffin-lids, and come walking back again? If they do, I never saw them. Well, they are more likely to come back than he is—much more likely. He is *done with*,” spreading out her hands, “so for God’s sake try and

help me to forget that there ever was such a person, instead of always throwing him in my teeth.” At the last words she catches her breath sobbingly, but resolutely forces back the tears that come crowding thickly under her hot lids. He stares at her stupidly still. “He only liked me when I was on my good behaviour,” she continues, with a hard-won smile, “and you know how seldom *that* is. I had an idea that *you* would take me whether I behaved well or ill, or not at all ; and so—and so—I sent for you.”

She stretches out her hand to him, smiling friendly, and he, catching it between both his own broad ones, covers it with silent kisses ; then, after a while, speaks slowly, and diffidently, blushing like a school girl :

“And you—you can tolerate the idea of being my wife ? You—like me a little ?”

“Like you ?” she says carelessly, with a

forced laugh. "Of course I do. What a question? Have not I asked you to marry me? What better proof could I give? Why should not I like you? You are young, good-looking, and a *parti*. Of course I like you."

He does not look very much satisfied with this expression of faith.

"You do not believe me?" she says, interrogatively. "Well, I have already given you one proof; I will give you another. I have asked you to marry me. I now ask you to marry me *soon*. I'm aware," laughing, "that it is not usual for such a proposition to come from the lady, but as I have begun by taking the initiative I suppose I must go on."

The look of wild, incredulous astonishment intensifies on his face and in his bold bright eyes. Are his ears faithful carriers of the words entrusted to them, or does his brain interpret them untruly?

“Lenore,” he says impetuously, throwing himself on his knees beside her, as she sits, leaning back in an arm-chair; forgive me for being such a fool, such an unmannerly brute, as to disbelieve what you say to me, but are you *sure*—I will not be angry if it is so—upon my soul I will try not to be—but are you *sure* that it is not a *joke*?—that you have not made me the subject of a bet; that this is not some trap that you are drawing me into? Confess—*confess* that it looks like it. Five days ago, you told me that the only boon you had to ask of me was that you might never see my face again—and, by heaven, if ever any woman looked as if she meant what she said you did then—and now—*now*—did I hear aright?—I am afraid to think so—you ask me to marry you *soon*?”

She hangs her head a little, as if ashamed, but says nothing.

“Is it any wonder,” he continues, ex-

citedly, "that when I have been crying for the moon for the last six months, and hating my life and myself, and even all my own people, because I could not get it, that when it falls down on a sudden at my feet I should wish to know what brought it there?—is it any wonder that I should wish to see the *dessous des cartes*?"

"There is no *dessous*," she says gravely. "What can I say? I am sick of asseverating! As I believe in God, and am unutterably afraid of him," (looking solemnly up and shuddering,) "I am speaking truth! What reason *can* I give? I have none. I am tired of being Lenore Herrick, that is all. It is a name that has brought me no luck; perhaps Lenore Scrope will bring me better."

"God grant that it may!" he says, earnestly, drawing her towards him, into his arms and to his broad breast. "Sweet,

give me one kiss, and I shall believe you.”

So she gives him one kiss. Only five days ago ! Only five days ago !

END OF VOL. II.



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